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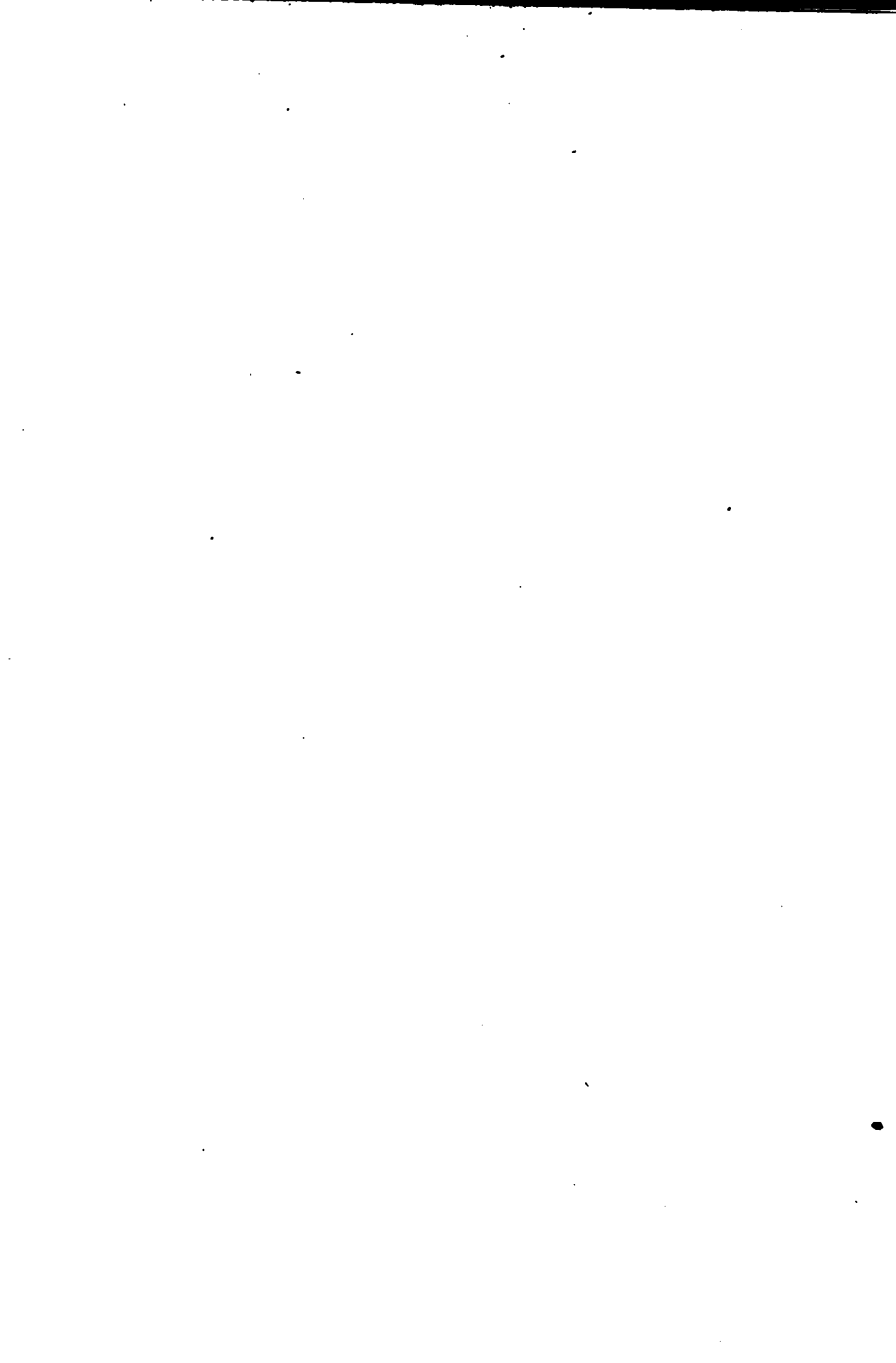
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LILY HOPE AND HER FRIENDS

HETTY BOWMAN.

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LILY HOPE AND HER FRIENDS.

Frontispiece.

LILY HOPE
AND HER FRIENDS.

A STORY.

HELEN FOWLER.

AUTHOR OF "THE LITTLE GIRL OF THE LANE."

* 2 2011.

HOLLAND AND STOUTEN,

7, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1857.



LILY HOPE
AND HER FRIENDS:

A Tale.

BY
HETTY BOWMAN,
AUTHOR OF "CHAPTERS IN THE LIFE OF ELSIE ELLIS," ETC., ETC.

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LILY HOPE AND HER FRIENDS.

CHAPTER I.

LIGHT FADING AND GROWING.

7



CHILD was alone in a small parlour, her forehead pressed against the latticed window-panes, while a pair of wistful eyes, within which lay a world of questions, looked up to the quiet evening sky. The room itself was in shade ;—so was the village street into which it looked, but a gleam of warm light crept slowly up a row of elms opposite ;—and a spire which rose behind them was tinted with gold. Higher, higher rose the line of sunset brightness, and softly the shade stole after it, silent and grey. The child watched till the last ray had faded, and then, turning away from

A

the window, she threw herself full length on the floor, her fingers twisted together in an agony she struggled hard to control. Then came a burst of tears, passionate, but not with anger, rather with the yearning which, in later years, becomes for most of us a guest but too familiar, though its first touch fell upon the child-heart with a chill. For another shadow was in the house, colder and deeper than the twilight. Slowly, gently, in the quiet room above, a human life was drawing to its close ; dying out, as the sunbeams died, but, like them, only to be 'lifted higher.'

'Oh mamma, mamma ! don't go away and leave me !'

The 'going away' was an indefinite mystery to the little one, and so was the dim beyond, the 'being with God,' which seemed darkened over with such a terrible want of meaning.

The storm passed, however, and the child raised herself, and resumed her old watch by the window, crouching close beside it, and shivering now and then. Only a few moments she sat there, but they seemed to her a blank dreary space, stretching on and on till she almost felt as if the cold twilight shadow had hung always over her life, and would wrap itself ever closer, closer till the end. For perhaps even for her the end must come. 'People all die and go away,'—but, beyond that, the struggling thought would not penetrate.

'Lily ! Lily ! It was a gentle voice that cailed, and

a smile lighted up the grave little face, as Lily bounded upstairs in answer to it. Too early yet for any sorrow to linger there !

One glance towards the wasted form on the bed, and then Lily rushed up to the lady who sat beside it, to give and receive more kisses than might be safely chronicled. Then, from some unexplained impulse, she drew herself up and stood quiet, playing with her friend's soft brown curls, and looking just what she was generally taken to be, an ordinary child enough, rather unimpressible than otherwise.

'Lily, darling?' 'Yes, mamma,' and Lily turned towards the bed. 'Come here to me;' and the white hands rested lovingly on her head as she knelt.

'Do you know that mamma is going away?' 'Yes,' said Lily, but the indifferent voice gave no token of that choking lump in the child's throat, which made it difficult to speak at all. The mother sighed. Was the bitterness of parting to be borne by her only? Better so, perhaps, and yet it was hard !

'Lily has not been quite good to-day.' 'No mamma,' and Lily's conscience gave a sharp prick, for she knew well that she had been exceedingly naughty, and that the quiet of the sick-room had been more than once disturbed by her disobedient restless ways. She was near throwing her arms round her mother's neck, and sobbing out confession and penitence, but the witness of other eyes was not to be borne, so she checked herself.

‘Lily, darling, perhaps sometime when you grow up and think of your mother, you may be sorry for what has happened to-day. But remember, remember Lillas, if ever this thought should make you sad, remember that your mother forgave you before she died. Will you, Lillas, my own, my own?’

‘Yes, mamma.’ Nothing more, though a flood of tears was just ready to break loose, if, in her pride and shyness, the child had not kept them resolutely back. Oh, Lillas, Lillas, how many have yearned to shed them where you might shed them now?

‘You need not stay, Lily? There was a touch of pain in the words, which Lily’s ears were quick to catch, and have been but too faithful to recal. Her lips parted to speak, but her mother had turned away, and the proud seal was on them again. Naughty little Lillas! But she has had her punishment. Is any so sad as the silence which alone answers words spoken too late?’

But, an hour afterwards, when she was left alone in the darkness, which, if it conceals some disguises, effectually strips off others, there came over her such a torrent of self-reproach as broke down all barriers of repression. Her pillow was wet with tears,—most perverse and unaccountable tears they were, which would never come when they might have been reasonably expected, leaving of course all sorts of wrong conclusions to be drawn from their absence.

Lily’s sleep the next morning was early broken.

Had papa come? for she knew he was expected the night before.

Dr Hope was a physician of some eminence at Arlingford, the fashionable suburb, itself a winter residence for invalids, of a large city in the west of England. For the sake of her failing health, Mrs Hope and her two children had been for some weeks at Alveston, a little village in Gloucestershire. Her husband came to her when he was able, and a sister was with her constantly.

This morning there was an unusual bustle in the house, a sound of hurrying steps, and voices that seemed to end in tears, and then stillness, stillness Lily could almost hear,—as she sat up in bed and listened. Winnie was beside her, but she slept on and heard nothing, and if she had, she was too tiny even to wonder. Through the window opposite, the morning sunbeams glinted into the room, but somehow they did not seem so bright as usual. Lily held her breath in a strange awe. Was the shadow of the Death-Angel upon the child's heart? Who can tell, for the little ones know many things that are hidden from our blunted sense!

After a while, however, she fell asleep again, and when she woke a second time she found the nurse by her bedside waiting to dress her.

'How's mamma this morning?' The girl hesitated a minute. 'She's better, miss. It's time for you to be up.'

'Oh, I'm so glad,' and Lily began to dress with

much glee and bustle, to a song without words, made up of happy thoughts.

'Perhaps mamma isn't going away after all; perhaps by-and-by she'll be able to go out again, perhaps'—and Lily's fancy added story after story to its fairy castle, till her face grew hot with eager hope. But all at once the bright look faded. A lady entered the room, a friend of her mother, and a frequent nurse during her illness, of whose somewhat stern opinions as to the conduct of little girls, Lily stood in considerable awe. She greeted the child with a warm kiss, however, which was very demurely returned, for Lily had her own theories about kisses, considering them always as favours granted rather than received.

'Mamma's better this morning, Mrs Clay,' she said, when her tangled hair was being coaxed into some sort of order. Mrs Clay and the nurse exchanged mysterious looks, of which Lily could make nothing.

'Doesn't she know?' whispered the former,

'No, ma'am, I couldn't'—

'Come here, Lily dear;' and Lily was lifted very tenderly, and told, in gentlest, kindest tones, that her mother had 'gone to be with God.'

A day or two afterwards, the two children were again in the small sitting-room where we saw Lily first. It looked very dismal, she thought. Why must the blinds be always down; and why must she be called

a naughty child if she tried to peep past them into the summer brightness? She was playing with her doll in a subdued, half-frightened fashion, for she could not help an uncertain consciousness that this was a proceeding at which everybody wondered. In fact there were several jarring elements in Lily's world just now, introducing confusion which she could by no means harmonize. Altogether life seemed very difficult, and no one could help her to understand it. Her doll might have done, she seemed to think, by the confidences poured into her patient ears, but she only smiled in return,—that calm smile with which some human beings are apt to put down questions they could never ask, much less answer. Wherefore Lily threw her down in a fit of impatience, and betook herself to the history of the 'Fair-child Family,' for already the world of books was to her a refuge from the more perplexing world of men and women. And so absorbed was she in the doings of those wonderful children, who will never grow old, that she did not hear a step in the room, or see that her papa had been for some minutes watching her.

'Would you like to see mamma again, my dear?' he asked, as he took her tiny hand in his.

'Mamma!' Lily was confounded beyond words. Had not mamma gone away, gone to be with God, and could any one ever come back, whom He had once taken to that far-off world of His? 'Oh dear,' she sighed to herself, 'I wish I could understand!' She glanced up at her papa,

but he only concluded she was ready to go with him, and led her out of the room without further explanation.

They went upstairs together. Lily's step nearly as slow as the one which was heavy with so great a grief, for her brain was in a maze too hopeless for her usual dance. And then into the very room where those farewell words of love and forgiveness had been spoken, which she kept laid up in her heart of hearts as a treasure whose worth she hardly knew. *Something* was there, she had been told, something about which she had wondered and pondered, and ventured once to ask a timid question; but *that* was not mamma! Still, she was to see her, and, as the door was slowly opened, her breath came fast in a mixture of awe and hope, and she glanced eagerly round the darkened room, half thinking to see some angel figure which would bend over her with the same smile she had loved so well to watch. Poor child! Poor motherless Lily! It was dreadful to see instead that narrow coffin, with the still white face within it, no smile, no answering look to Lily's wistful gaze. She did not cry, of course not,—no tears would come under the spell of that terrible fear, and it seemed, to undiscerning eyes, that she stood there perfectly indifferent. Indeed, in the midst of it all, some indefinite instinct told her she was being experimented upon, brought there to see whether she would cry or not. Wherefore in the pride and contradiction of her small heart, Lily would rather have endured anything than

give the least sign of feeling. So she waited by her papa's side, very pale and quiet, till he asked if she would like to go? Yes, indeed, she was only too thankful! One more glance! It *was* her mother surely, and yet, oh! why did she look so cold and white, and why, if she knew Lily was beside her, why did she not speak!

The child turned away and walked down stairs, slipping softly through the front door, and out into the air and sunshine, for she felt as if another moment in the house would suffocate her. Once outside, her steps quickened to a run. Through the garden, over the fence, across the field, till she reached a large sycamore, whose shade was often her summer nursery, and then, at last, safe from sight or comment, the pent-up feeling of the child's heart found expression 'Oh, mamma, mamma!' and the waving branches overhead sighed softly, as if in answer to her call. But Lily did not hear them. She only lay and sobbed, her arms stretched upon the grass, half clasping it in the sheer necessity of having something to cling to. One or two sunbeams fell through the dark leaves above her, and rested caressingly upon the slight prostrate figure. But they could not reach or brighten the grieved perplexed little heart. A human touch might have done it, but none near her was tender enough to give it, or quick enough to guess its need. But in God's own time and way, there came to her unconscious soothing. His hand comforted her, though she knew it not.



CHAPTER II.

LOOKING ONWARDS.



TWENTY to-morrow! How strange it seems!" and the young writer looked up from the page with a dreamy happy light in her eyes, which seemed to tell that past and future lay in equal sunshine. It was a fair face, sweet and true, changeful, but not restless, a face you would turn again to watch.

'It is only like yesterday since I stood at mamma's knee for my first Bible lesson, and now, childhood and girlhood are over, and womanhood is opening out,—the dim unknown! That Bible lesson,—what makes me think of it so much to-night, unless that I wish I could read the Bible now as I did then, with the same sweet sense of freshness and wonder. I do read it, of course, but I think I should be glad if I need not. It has grown familiar, without growing dear.

Perhaps if mamma had lived she might have taught me to love it as she loved. She always looked happy when she read it ; whereas most of the good people I know sigh over it as if it made them uncomfortable. It certainly makes me uncomfortable, but then I am not good ; I only wish I were !

At any rate, I am incomplete. Something is wanting to me, and I am looking and waiting for it. I feel as if my life had not yet been set to its key-note. I said that once to Miss Winter, and she replied, ' My dear, I'm sure you have everything to be thankful for.' And so I have. But the reminder only made me cross.

I have seen one person to-day who seems to be *living out* the harmony which my ears only catch now and then,—far off and dim. I was crossing the hall in the morning, when I saw a lady coming out of the consulting-room, whom for a wonder I happened to know. It was Mrs Leigh, whom papa brought in to luncheon one day awhile since, with her little girl, a fragile-looking child of four, as pure and pale as a snowflake. I remember being struck with her at the time,—there was something so rested about her,—a kind of contented calm. Yet she wore mourning, and papa told us that her husband, who was a missionary, had died abroad. I have often thought of her since, and wished to see her, but papa allows no questions about patients, and as she did not appear, I could make no inquiries. However, when I saw her this morning, I went forward at once to ask

after her little girl. 'She is not with me now,' she said quietly, while the clear brown eyes grew dim. I was so shocked, and hardly knew what to say.

'Nay, don't mind it,' and she spoke in such real feeling for my distress, that it might have seemed as if I were the mourner; 'you could not know, and I am so glad you remembered my darling.' I drew her into the drawing-room, and she told me how her pet blossom had drooped and faded, till the angel reaper bore it to the fields above.

'Have you any left?' I asked.

'None,' she answered softly; 'I think sometimes of Henry Vaughan,—

'They are all gone into a world of light,
And I alone sit lingering here.'

Just then papa came, and asked her again to stay to luncheon, which she did. I found that she is living in furnished apartments near us, devoting herself to the poor and the sick. It seems such a beautiful life, full of self forgetful love and sacrifice,—so different from mine!

And yet if I could choose, I would not do many things I do. The housekeeping, for instance, which Miss Winter has very contentedly resigned to my charge, *that* I would gladly be excused, for it involves contact with cook, and sometimes collision—a thing to be dreaded! And some thinking and planning are required too, though we live very quietly, at least we have done till lately. But now that Winnie is at home, we

are beginning to visit more, and I suppose next winter we shall be fairly 'out.' She enjoys parties greatly ; no wonder she is so full of spirit and grace. It is an untold delight to me to see how she wins her way with every one, my beautiful bright sister. No wonder Captain Herbert picked her up so soon, though I do think he might have left her to us a while longer. What will home, what will life be, without Winnie? And he will be over from Ireland in two months, I suppose, to settle everything, and carry her off to India. Oh! Winnie, Winnie, our sunbeam, there will be no brightness left when you are away?

And yet, Winnie is not all sweetness. I should tire of her if she were; those sweet people are the greatest bores in the world. She is 'a rosebud, set with little wilful thorns,' which can prick upon occasion. But they never prick me.

Papa will miss her; oh, so sorely! She is more like our mother than I am, and I think—but no, I am sure he loves us alike, and if he did not, I could not be jealous of Winnie; only I wish I could show him my love as she does. But whenever the fire is burning deep down in my heart, I must needs draw the curtains that no one may see it. Wherefore, I suppose, outside beholders think it has died out, if it was ever lighted. If the love would only utter itself somehow, in tender words or playful caressing ways, like Winnie's! But it will not. It is only dumb, and true.

I am rather relieved that Miss Winter has gone. Her still propriety was a kind of burden, even to me; and the way Winnie and she rasped one another, was simply hopeless. So now we are without a chaperone, and I wish we need not have one at all. But papa thinks us too young to be left alone, and so I suppose we are, as he can so seldom be with us.

I asked Mrs Leigh to come to the pic-nic to-morrow, never thinking, till the words were said, what an unlikely thing it was for her to do. But it is not a pic-nic, only a day in the woods, with the Harpers, and the Grahames, and Miss May, and when I explained this, she consented to come. I am very glad. I wish I could ask her to help me to find the key-note.

It is rather strange that I never think of asking Mr Harper, though he is our clergyman. But he is always so busy, in a whirl of societies, and committees, and meetings, and visitings. Perhaps he might help me if he would only stop for half-an-hour and listen. But in the constant *going on*, I feel it is no use to speak. And I am not sure he would understand me if I did.

We shall be going down to Alveston soon. Could I speak to Mr Thornton? But that would be still more impossible. I feel sure his sermons are always good, only his voice sounds somehow a long way off, as if addressing an audience out of sight, not at all in the same world as the one which is to me so perplexing, and so very difficult to live in. And whenever I think it is

coming nearer, and bringing some light and help for me and my world, it seems to float away again, so that in time I get rather weary of following it, and am satisfied to let it go on over my head, saying what I know to be unexceptionably excellent, but which has no particular application. But there is Winnie !'

And just then Winnie entered the room; and Lilius Hope's journalising was interrupted. You might tell at a glance that the two were sisters. There was the same light swaying grace of form in each, the same pure moulding of feature. But the brightness on Winnie's cheek and hair left Lily's almost cold beside it, for her complexion, though perfectly clear, was pale ; and her coil of brown plaits had not the gleam of gold which flashed among her sister's curls.

As soon as they were old enough, after their mother's death, the children were sent to school, where most of their life had been passed since. Many were the wonderings among Dr Hope's numerous acquaintance, as to a probable and suitable successor to his first wife. But he did not seem inclined to instal any one in that office, being probably of opinion that the place which could not be filled, should not be desecrated. And now, as years had rolled on, and his daughters had grown up to womanhood, it was less than ever to be expected that he would give them a second mother. Though, indeed, it is just when such events appear removed beyond all likelihood, that they generally happen.



CHAPTER III.

SUNSHINE AND SHADOWS.

IUST the day for a pic-nic, I am so glad, Lilas!' and Winnie Hope paused to take breath, after bestowing a shower of birthday kisses, 'though ;—indeed, one can hardly call it a pic-nic, this queer little gathering which you have chosen to do yourself honour. I can't think why you didn't invite more people and make a proper thing of it.'

'I'm sorry, Winnie, that you would have enjoyed it more. But those little Harpers, it will be such a delight to them, and—it's my birthday,' she added, with a smile into Winnie's face.

'You dear old thing! you shall enjoy yourself in your own way, and I—I enjoy myself always.'

'I believe you do, little singing-bird,' said Dr Hope, coming into the breakfast-room. He put an arm round

each of his girls, and gazed at them with mingled love and pride. Perhaps the penetrating grey eyes grew a shade softer as they rested on Winnie, but there was no lack of tenderness in the greeting to his eldest—‘God bless you my child, this day, and ever.’ His voice faltered, and the three stood in silence. The sisters clasped one another’s hands, for the shadow of parting was upon them both, and for Lily there was nothing to brighten it. It could not be so dark to the young *fiancée*, though even to her there was pain in the law which bade her leave all for one.

‘There’s the postman!’ It was rather a welcome interruption, and Winnie rushed to the box to receive the usual allowance for her papa, numerous packages for Lily, and one letter for herself, looked for among the heap with eager fingers.

‘You musn’t stay to read all those, Lily, nor you Winnie, either. Ring the bell for prayers, my dear, I have to go out early.’ And accordingly, after swallowing a hasty breakfast, the doctor was just preparing to leave the room, when Winnie stopped him.

‘Papa, can’t you come with us to-day?’ she asked.

‘My dear child, who but yourself would ask such a thing!’

‘But do;—it’s so lovely,—this 21st of June. It would do you good.’

‘I have to think of doing other people good.’

‘But I’m sure they don’t want you to-day. This.

sunshine will do them good without you. Oh, do come, papa !' and Winnie jumped up to twine her arms round his neck, which she could just do by standing on tip-toe. Lily, meanwhile, sat behind the tea-urn, all the more quiet because this thing which she did not ask, would have been to her the sweetest birth-day joy. Dr Hope took possession of the little arms, and held them fast.

'*Where* are you going? I forget. 'Down to Pentland. Mrs Grahame and Mrs Harper are to escort us, and I think Charlie Grahame is going too. Mr Harper can't come, he's got some kind of a horrid duty to do.'

'Most people have, except singing-birds like you. And Charlie Grahame,—if *he* thought a little more of duty, it would be all the better for him. I didn't take so many holidays when I was his age. But I'll tell you what I'll do, Winnie, if I can ;—only don't expect me. I'll come down by the five o'clock train. I suppose you'll have some tea going, and then I can help to bring you home, for such a set of wild creatures will be too much for the meekness of Mrs Harper, and the—well, we'll call it languor,—of Mrs Grahame, even with our staid Lily to help them.' And once more, a most unwonted thing, Dr Hope bent down to kiss his elder girl, little guessing how the token of love, which she was too timid to seek, would be treasured for many a day.

In due time the pic-nic party met at the railway. Its elements were sufficiently various. First of all, there was Miss May, an old family friend of the Hopes, who

remembered the doctor in petticoats, and treasured various legends of that stage of his existence, which were delighted in by his girls. She was a genial old lady, who seemed to live in such perpetual sunshine, that she had absorbed it into her face, whence it rayed out again in smiles. And the smiles were so bright, that you forgave the chatter which accompanied them, kindly always, and full of quaint wisdom, if sometimes a little involved. Then there was Mrs Harper, the wife of the Vicar of St Catherine's, and the mother of numerous little Harpers, who grew and multiplied in proportion to the smallness of their father's living. She was a pale, sweet-faced woman, who looked as if life were too much for her, which probably it was, with narrow means and an annual baby, boys that *would* grow out of their jackets, and girls that 'must be taught something.' There were other troubles too, in the drooping, melancholy eyes, for they held the memory of more than one little life, broken off short here, and linked on to the Life Eternal: safe, the mother knew, but far from the yearning empty arms that would fain have held them still. For Mrs Harper by no means endorsed Miss May's sentiments on the death of babies, the latter never rising in her attempts at consolation, beyond the assurance that it was 'well for them, poor things; if some more of them took good ways, they'd be saved a deal of sin and sorrow!' Which reflections, it must however be added, were always delivered with tears of genuine sympathy.

Beside Mrs Harper and her attendant troop, were Mrs, and Miss, and Mr Charlie Grahame. Mr Grahame had been a medical associate of Dr Hope, who had befriended his widow ever since his death, and through whose influence his son, after the usual course of medical education, had just obtained a good appointment in the City Hospital. Charlie professed profound gratitude to his patron, which he inclined to show by admiration of his eldest daughter. Lily took his homage resignedly for the most part, though she was now and then stirred into an absolute repulse of it, which, as Charlie philosophically observed, 'meant either that she liked it or that she didn't.'

Between Lily and Nellie Grahame there were some attempts at intimacy, which never carried them beyond preliminaries. Both were reserved, and Nellie had the sensitive half-morbid pride, which placed an impalpable barrier between the daughter of the fashionable physician, and the poor daily governess, for such she was. And Lily, who never dreamed of patronizing, sometimes gave offence, which might have been avoided if she had. But, for all that, they will be friends one day, for links were drawing them together, stronger than either knew.

Last of the group, but with an unconscious harmonising power, which soon made her the centre of it, was Mrs Leigh, who won poor Mrs Harper's heart, by quietly taking the little ones off her hand during the journey, and making them 'good.'

Pentland was a favourite resort of the Arlingford people for pic-nic excursions, being within easy access, about ten miles by rail, and combining the beauties both of sea and wood. It is a sort of point or little promontory, jutting out into the Bristol Channel, picturesque with rocks and trees, and with a view of the blue Welsh hills in the distance. To the Harper children a day here was a rare pleasure, unattainable, unless, as on the present occasion, by the help of another purse. So they were in the highest state of excitement, from five-year old Lucy, the youngest, who had been permitted to come, up to Mary, who was grave with the responsibility of sixteen. Between them were three boys and another girl of seven.

‘What shall we do before luncheon?’ was the general question, when the party emerged from the station. ‘Miss Hope,’ said Charlie Grāhame, ‘you have the ordering of us, what is your pleasure?’

‘That every one should follow his own,’ said Lily, ‘won’t that be best? And shall we meet at two o’clock for luncheon? I told Arnison to have the baskets unpacked beside that large beech-tree we all know in the woods, the “Seven Sisters,” and we can ramble about till then.’

‘I want to go and sail my boat,’ chimed in Lucy Harper, ‘not on the great big sea,’ she explained, her eyes growing round and large as she looked at it, ‘just on a little tiny sea somewhere.’

'Yes, you shall,' said Winnie Hope, 'you shall come with me down to the shore, and we'll find a nice little sea all to ourselves. Will you trust me with them?' she said, turning to Mrs Harper.

'I'll go too, mamma,' said Mary.

Winnie laughed. 'I see I'm not responsible.' But she did not know that the shy girl's admiration of the beautiful young lady made her content with even a sight of her fluttering muslin dress, or the drooping feather of her hat. To catch a glimpse of Winnie in Church, or to meet her in the street, would make the day bright for Mary Harper.

'Take some biscuits with you, then,' said Miss May, opening a certain black silk bag, which the Harpers knew of old, and at which, indeed, Millie and Lucy had been gazing for some time past, to the great scandal of their elder sister. 'I'm sure those little people will be hungry before two o'clock.'

'I'm hungry now,' said Lucy candidly, stretching out two fat hands.

'To be sure you are, and so are the boys. There, fill your pockets,—you three,—and be off. Mr Grahame yes, have some too, and hadn't you better take them for a good walk?' Mr Grahame appreciated Miss May's biscuits more than her suggestion. He would much have preferred to hover about Lily, but his good-nature overcame him. 'Yes, we'll go to the Craggs, boys, come along. They'll be safe enough,' he added, 'I'll engage

to bring back three heads, six arms, six legs, all sound—never fear.'

'I'm hungry, too, Miss May,' said Winnie, 'you used to give me goodies out of this very bag when I was a child, and I'm sure I like them just as well now.'

'Bless you! you'll always be a child to me,' said the old lady, 'even when you're married, with as many children as Mrs Harper. You'll know what life means then, won't she, Mrs Leigh? She won't step quite so light,' she added, as they watched the buoyant 'graceful figure springing down the rock, while Lily and Nellie Grahame, meanwhile, paired off in another direction.

'No; but one would not anticipate the shadows.'

'One can't at any rate. You couldn't make a creature like Winnie Hope believe that there would ever be anything for her but sunshine and blue sky. Now, Lily's different,—given to pondering and thinking. It's curious how unlike people are. It's their nature I suppose. They're different, like trees, and you can't make birches into elms, or poplars into oaks. And that always puzzles me,' said the old lady, with a meditative shake of her bonnet-strings, 'because, if people can't be made different from what they are, why are they to be blamed for being themselves and not somebody else? Of course I know all the explanations about the power of the will, and so on, but I never feel as if they made it any clearer,—and it's difficult to understand,—very. And if I think much about it I always get a headache and feel

cross, so it's wiser for old women like me to let it all alone, and just go on, being as good as I can myself. And after all I suppose nature only makes a little bit of us, and the rest grows, and we have to see that it grows the right way. There's room for us all in the world, and use too. But, as I was saying about Winnie Hope, I did try,—being always partly in place of a mother to those two girls, poor things,—I thought it only my duty to talk very seriously to Winnie when she got engaged, and so I said to her one day when she came in, just at my tea-time, for I always like an early tea, Mrs Harper, don't you? Yes, one feels quite a different creature after tea, for all the homœopathsists say about it's being bad for the nerves. I've no patience with such new-fangled nonsense; there were no nerves when I was young, and there wouldn't be so many now, if they wern't so much petted. They never troubled me much, and I've drank tea all my life, and mean to go on till the end. But I was talking about Winnie. Oh! yes, and I said to her, 'Winnie my love, isn't it time for you to think about housekeeping, now you are going to be married? I suppose you fancy that a little of this, and this, and that,—thrown together by what that young lecturer at the Athenæum (who didn't understand it himself, so it was no wonder he bewildered other people) would have called a 'principle of natural selection,' will make a pudding of themselves, and that fruit has a tendency to preserve itself, and pickles—'One can buy pickles,' she said, with that be-

witching little smile of hers,—“Crosse and Blackwell’s—they’re the best.”’

‘Well, but, my dear,’ I said, for I was determined she *should* listen, ‘you may buy pickles, and get your sewing done by one of those abominable machines that are nothing but a device to make women useless, but you can’t get everything done by machinery, and you mightn’t happen always to have a maid. Your husband’s buttons, for instance,—you don’t know how much a man’s comfort, aye, and his temper too, depends on his buttons, and there’s no machine invented yet that knows exactly when they come off, and where to sew them on again.’

‘Ah, well,’ she said, ‘but you’ll see how steady and grave I shall grow, Miss May, and I’m laying up a store of wisdom now, oh, so precious, only I haven’t begun to use it yet! And what can you say to a creature like that? It’s no use lecturing!’

And so the old lady rambled on, while her two companions listened and laughed, which was all they needed to do, Miss May being one of those talkers whose minds are active enough to supply all response themselves, keeping up a perpetual murmur of words without the stimulus of any reply.

Lily and Nellie Grahame, meanwhile, were sauntering slowly on the higher ground, looking down on rocks and sea below. The tide was coming in,—creeping slowly, slowly over the level sand, and the dash of its

waves was borne up to them by the breeze. The two girls sat down and watched it, in silence for awhile, till Nellie said,—

‘Do let us go somewhere else, Miss Hope. Those waves are too much for me.’

‘Certainly,’ said Lily, rising, ‘but what in the world do you mean?’

‘What I can’t explain, what I don’t suppose is within the comprehension of any properly constituted mind.’

‘I’m afraid that isn’t a compliment, but if you would try—’

‘Well,’ said Nellie, a little more gently, ‘there is something to me always irresistibly painful in the rising of the tide on a calm day. When there’s wind you feel as if it were in some measure accounted for, but when it advances without any apparent cause, creeping over the land, resistless, silent,—it seems then an image, to me almost terrible, of those inevitable forces in life that are only to be submitted to, never resisted, forces generally of waste and change.’

Lily did not know how to answer her. Such thoughts had never come to her, in her quite home-shelter. She was conscious of a ‘want’ in her life, but the ‘forces of waste and change’ she had never faced. The one sorrow of her mother’s death lay back in that golden light of childhood, which is not easily darkened; and none had troubled her since. So she said, more confidently than she would do years after, ‘But the

tides are obedient to law. They all own their Master—"Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther."

'Yes,' said Nellie, and her brown eyes flashed with strange light; 'but all that is fair, and sweet, and dear, may be swept away before the "hitherto" is spoken! And law—what is law—who can tell? I only know it's something you may break your heart against. But what does it matter? You drift out to sea,—and there's another boat gone down.'

Lily did not attempt to reply this time. She was too much startled and pained. But there had been another listener. Mrs Leigh, a little weary of good Miss May's monologue, had quietly stolen away, and, in her quick walk, had overtaken the two girls, both too much absorbed to heed the light step on the turf behind them. Lily welcomed her with a look of relief, and Nellie, though she started in some momentary vexation, could not resist the gentle eyes that met hers.

'I did not intend to shock two people,'—she began.

'You have not shocked me,'—said Mrs Leigh. 'I have felt the same, many a time.'

It was little wonder, Lily thought. There had been tides in *her* life, bringing desolation enough. Nellie's face softened. She stooped to pick a blue-bell from the grass, and said nothing.

'There are flowers left beyond the reach of tide,' said Mrs Leigh, smiling, 'and He who rules the waves speaks to us from the cross. The mystery of pain and

loss grows lighter there, for beyond death,—through death,—is resurrection.'

'But that is so far away!' said Nellie. Lily, at that moment, to her great regret, was summoned down to the shore by a shout from Winnie and the Harpers, who had found some steps in the rock, and called to her to come to them. Her two companions walked on without her. 'That cross is so far away, and you have to labour on and on before you reach it, over stones and stumbling-blocks, and it always seems further and further off; and there are difficulties that are hard and sharp, and that keep you back and knock you down helplessly. And sometimes you wonder—'

'If it is there at all,' her thoughts added, and Mrs Leigh knew how to interpret the silence. 'It must be its own witness,' she replied. 'I may tell you that it is there, behind the clouds; but that will help you little until you hear Christ's voice from it—"Come unto me."'

'Do you suppose that all hear that voice, Mrs Leigh? Are there none to whom it never comes?'

'None who will hear it—none who long for it—none. There may be some to whom it does not speak; but only those to whom it has said, "*Because I have called and ye refused.*" For all but these, there may be long waiting in silence, but there will be an answer of peace at last.'

Nellie's reply was an outbreak which her mother would have groaned over as irreverent, but which Mrs Leigh, with more charity, took only as the index of her own unrest.

‘Peace ! I wonder if there is such a thing—that kind of peace, I mean! People talk about it, and, in a way, they have it ; that is, they take it for granted. And they are too busy about other things, perhaps about good things, to find out their mistake. And in the intervals of doing good, they read diaries, and sometimes get the length of writing them, and so all goes on smoothly, with the help of nice phrases (that are very like cant). And they go to Church, where some dear good man soothes them with a “sweet sermon,” just relieved from insipidity by a little racy abuse of Popery; or else, they attend a Bible-reading, where they are too impatient to listen, and too nervous to speak, but from which they still come away “much refreshed.” But when they begin to think, if they ever do—when they separate their own true life from this buzzing crowd of nothings—I don’t believe they know what real peace is then, any more than I do.’ She stopped, out of breath, but in a moment she was off again.

‘There are so many things I can’t understand ! Though, by the way,’ she added, laughing, ‘remembering some of those evenings when we have tea and theology, till I am sick of both, I’m inclined to fancy that, in proportion as people don’t understand subjects they discuss, is the confidence with which they pronounce upon them. The deeper, truer knowledge, I should think, must always bring hesitations and balancings, not favourable to those beautifully clear definitions and as-

sections, which are so satisfactory to make, and so difficult to contradict.'

'I suppose,' said Mrs Leigh, 'it is while we see only one side of a truth that we are very confident. When we go round, and get a glimpse of the other, we begin to hesitate. But there are some we cannot afford to be in suspense about. And if only our hearts are at rest on Christ, we can be content to wait *with Him*, for the "knowing hereafter," which He has promised. If only—!'

The two little words would bear fruit some day—it might be long hence. Nellie made no reply. It rather vexed her to think how much she had said already, and to a stranger too! She would draw in now. There should be no more revelations. So she looked at her watch, and suggested that they had better turn towards the rendezvous.

They were almost the last to reach it. The three boys were gathered round their mother, eagerly telling the wonders of their walk, and emptying their pockets of a mass of natural history specimens, animate and inanimate, which sent Mrs Grahame and Miss May into a succession of little shrieks.

'Beautiful? No indeed! Nasty things, nasty things! And they may sting, or bite, or something.'

'Look at that fellow, mamma! Isn't he splendid? Oh, you should have seen him in the water! We got him in a little pool under a rock, and we had such work

to catch him. Why, he won't hurt you, Miss May; do just look at him!

Another scream from Miss May. 'Oh, do take care! He'll get on the table-cloth. Oh, oh, oh!'

'Stop, Harry'—and Mrs Harper's soft voice somehow found its way through all the din—'Don't you see that you are frightening Miss May very much?'

'Well, she's an old stupid,' was Harry's comment; but he put his specimens away, though not for Miss May's sake.

'Now, do let us have some lunch. Oh, I remember pic-nics, when I was young, in this very spot, some, I daresay, forty years ago—it's a bit out of one's life, isn't it? Ah, well it's curious—I don't feel any older now than I did then—not so old, really. It's only in the middle that the years are heavy; they're lighter at the two ends, and you see I'm at *the other* end now.'

'Yes, Charlie, thank you—Mr Grahame, I ought to say—I'm quite comfortable, very, though that bit of rock is rather sharp at one's back, and—'

'Now are we all here? Yes, there are Mrs Leigh and Nellie coming, and there's Winnie and Millie—Lucy shall sit by me—Where's my little friend Lucy?'

The question was repeated from one to another, and 'I thought she was with you,' and, 'I thought she was with you,' passed in rapid interchange. 'She must be safe, she can't possibly be far,' said Winnie Hope, answering Mrs Harper's look of dismay. 'The children were with us when we left the shore, and I saw them

after we turned into the wood. Mary and I were walking on first ; and Lily and the little ones were behind.'

'Yes,' said Lily. 'Oh, how careless I have been not to keep sight of them both! I remember Lucy lingering to gather some flowers, and I called to her to come on, or we should be late, and I quite thought she was close to us. But that was only a little way back. She can't have wandered far.'

'We'll go and look,—come boys,' said Charlie Grahame. 'Will you come with us, Miss Hope, and show us exactly where you saw her last? No one else need follow, and don't be alarmed, Mrs Harper, you'll see we'll bring her back in five minutes. Go on with luncheon.'

They started off in pursuit, Mrs Harper sitting still, as she was told, apparently listening to Miss May's assurances that there was 'nothing to be frightened about, nothing.' Ten minutes passed—twenty—thirty. At last there were sounds of returning steps. But no Lucy.

'It's absurd to think of being alarmed,' said Charlie Grahame, 'what possible harm could come to the child? She's as safe among these trees as in her nursery at home.'

'I know that,' said the mother, softly. 'But still,' added Charlie, 'we must go and look for her. We'll divide ourselves into four, you Arnison, and I, and the three boys; there's no need for any of you ladies to go.

Unless'—and he glanced at Lily, but she looked straight among the trees.

'I'll go,' said Mrs Harper, and as all felt it would be best for her, no one tried to dissuade. Winnie offered to accompany her, and then, after agreeing on some signals, and arranging that, whether successful or not, all should meet again at the same place in an hour, the party separated.

'I think we may as well have some lunch,' said Miss May, when the rest were gone. 'When I was young I used to starve myself when anything troubled me, but I've grown wiser since then. Come, Mary; yes, I know you think you can't eat anything, but just try! And you, little Millie, nay, never cry, Lucy will be found, you'll see. That's right, Mary, try and get it down. Nothing helps one to look at the bright side of things more than one's dinner, when one wants it!'

'I hope, my dear Mary,' chimed in Mrs Grahame, and Mrs Leigh, catching an impatient gleam from Nellie's eyes, understood the half railing bitterness which had pained her so much in their talk, 'that you'll remember this lesson on the uncertainty of all human happiness. You didn't anticipate such a clouding of your day's pleasure.'

'No,' said poor Mary, with quivering lips. 'Oh, so it is always, my dear; and these little troubles are meant to prepare you for harder ones, for life is full of them, and we can none of us escape.'

It was not quite easy to follow Miss May's advice during these predictions, but Mary contrived to swallow something, and then put as great a distance as she conveniently could between herself and the speaker. 'I wish I might have gone too,' she murmured, when, after awhile, Mrs Leigh came up to her, as she sat looking off to the distant sea-line, just visible through the trees, 'it's so hard to wait and do nothing!'

'It is *very* hard, dear.' Mary looked up into the patient face, and felt comforted, she knew not why. 'And I don't think it ever grows quite easy. One can only turn to Christ in the waiting, and remember that He knows how hard it is, and that He is near, through it all. "A very present help," she repeated, when, a few minutes afterwards, Lily came up, and Mary, with quick self-reproach for neglect of elder-sisterly duties, went off to amuse Millie, "a very present help:" it is not far to seek!'

'Perhaps not,' said Lily mournfully, 'but if you don't know where to look, what you want *is* far away, however near. Of course God promises to hear prayer. But one must trust Him as a Father before one can quite take the comfort of that promise!'

'Yes, and how can it be? It seems so difficult to *mean* those words,—“Our Father, which art in Heaven!” But if only they were true, true for one's self, how different life would be.'

'Do you remember those words in St John, they

helped me once, years ago, "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God?" I think they answer this very difficulty. I know so well what it is to say, "Our Father," and yet not to have the heart of a child,—not the love there ought to be, the sweet warm rest which would make the child glad in its father's presence. We are content to let the day pass on without speaking to Him, we don't care to read His Word. We feel all this, and yet all our striving, all our efforts, seem in vain.'

'Yes,' said Lily, eagerly, 'it's like half-heard music, you can't set your life to it.'

'No, and God is teaching us this, through all the bitterness of failure. It is His lesson for us, learned often through tears and pain—"Without me ye can do nothing." But if we let the striving cease, if we look up from the sorrow and shame of it, and hear His glad message of help—"To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God"—'

'But what does it mean after all? What is it to receive Him?'

'Is it not just to come to Him, empty, helpless, nothing,—not always grieving for sin, often hardly feeling it, but still *to come*, to take His free gift of life and healing, of love and pardon? This is all. And then, to those who thus receive Him, He gives "power to become the sons of God." You cannot feel as a child before you are one,—but He will give you the heart of

a child, and then the love, the freedom, the joy, will follow. The Gospel of Christ has life within itself, and power to impart life.'

Was not this the answer to Lily's unspoken longing? Was not this the thread of gold, which should lead her into light unknown? But she said nothing, and Mrs Leigh, concluding that she was tired of the subject, turned off to something else. And once more Lily sighed within herself, 'If I could only speak!'

But hark! Was there not a shout, a hurrah? 'She's found,' said Lily, springing to her feet. And so she was, for Phil and Harry were just bringing her back, safe and sound, except for sundry scratches, and a bruise on one round shoulder. Mrs Harper soon heard the signal, and came up to take her child from Miss May's lap, and kiss her as only a mother could.

'Where did you find her?' 'What was she doing?' were questions asked in a breath by everyone, and both easily enough answered, for the little stray had been found in a small hollow, covered over by trailing wreathes of wild roses and brambles, down which she had slipped, at the bottom of which she was lying fast asleep.

Poor Lucy, the story of her wandering was very simple, though it was rather difficult to come at the truth of it from her confused account afterwards, when she was finally tucked up in her crib, and mamma's face leaned on the pillow beside her. She saw some 'pretty blue flowers' among the grass, as she came up from the

shore, and lingered behind the rest to gather them. And there were 'such beauties' further on, that her feet were tempted deeper and deeper among the trees, quite beyond hearing of Lily's voice when she called to her to hasten onwards. And when she wished to return, she lost her way, and after wandering till she was very tired, missed her footing in trying to grasp some roses, and fell down, and down, till, as she said, she 'didn't know any more.' For when she recovered the stun of her fall, she had wondered a little how she came where she was, she quietly went to sleep, and so remained till she was discovered.

The interrupted luncheon was a merry meal after that, and the rest of the afternoon full of merriment, too, and, perhaps, the gipsy tea. When, true to his promise, Dr Hope joined the party, his professional gravity thrown off, and the playful humour it could never entirely hide for once gaining free play, was after all, the merriest thing in the day.

'Now,' said Winnie, when tea was over, 'there's just time before the train, for me to get that fern I want. Who'll come with me,—papa?'

'We'll all go,' shouted the boys in chorus; 'it's jolly for a walk now?'

'There isn't time,' said Miss May. 'Why the train's at half-past seven, we shall only just catch it. Nonsense, Winnie, there *isn't* oceans of time, and besides, can't you

get some ferns on the way to the station? I saw quantities as we came along.'

'Not the one I want,' said Winnie, demurely, 'there is a difference between one kind and another, and this is a rare one, only grows in a particular place. Come, papa,' and, with a merry look of defiance, Winnie tripped off, while Miss May smiled, which she always did after she had scolded.

'There's never any satisfaction in being angry with Winnie,' she said, 'one always feels so conquered. Now there are some people one can get into a temper with, and be really the better for it. But come, Lily, my dear, we'll walk slowly on; I always like to be in good time, and I think a station is such an amusing place, I never care how long I wait there.'

Lily herself did not quite share this taste; but she put her liking aside, and endured the dusty noisy waiting-room with what patience she might, listening dreamily to her old friend's talk, while the rest of the party sauntered on the platform outside.

'Dear me!' said Miss May, when the station clock pointed to within five minutes of train-time—'how can they run it so near, and Dr Hope with them, too, and this the last train to-night. They'll never be here, or they'll get overheated with walking fast, and catch their deaths of cold, or—'

But at that moment Lily caught sight of one of the Harper boys, running alone towards the station gate.

He called Charlie Grahame aside, who seemed to grow grave as he listened to him, and then turned slowly to the waiting-room door. She met him with a white scared face, fearing she knew not what.

‘Lilies, Miss Hope,’ he stammered, ‘don’t be alarmed, pray. There has been an accident, your sister has had a fall, but I hope—.’





CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOW DEEPENS.

THE June roses had long passed away from garden and hedge, and now there were purple blackberries in the one, and gleams of scarlet and gold, the autumn glory of geraniums and calceolarias, in the other. And in some human lives the summer glow seemed over; was it fading or ripening into mellow harvest?

Dr Hope, more careworn than when we saw him last, was pacing his library, while a gentleman, whom he addressed by the familiar surname, stood with his back to the fire at its further end; for the September evening was chilly, and a cheerless rain outside made brightness within acceptable. But no glow from polished steel bars could charm away the cloud on the Doctor's brow.

'Then you think, Norris,—nay, I needn't ask, for

'I've seen it myself,—only I shut my eyes,—that she'll never walk again?'

'It doesn't *seem* likely. You see—' here followed some words of professional explanation. 'But, after all, one can't tell; she's young, and youth has wonderful rallying power. By the way, how did you say the accident happened?'

'She fell, in gathering some ferns, I never could rightly tell how; but I think she had scrambled up a hedge—hardly a hedge either, but a low bank of earth;—there was a deep stone ditch on the other side—she lost her balance in reaching over.'

Just then came a tap at the door. The Doctor opened it.

'Please, papa, will you come to Winnie soon? She seems so restless.'

'Yes, in a few minutes,' and the Doctor closed the door again, heedless of Lily's questioning look. 'She made me promise,' he said, turning to his companion, 'that I would tell her exactly what you said.'

'A rash promise, Hope; you wouldn't keep it with any other patient.'

'I don't know. It would depend on character and circumstances. I've always dealt much in truth-speaking. But my poor child, it is the blighting of her life. She was to have been married this month.'

He walked to the window, and gazed out into the rain, while his friend,—for they were friends,—watched

him with a face that was strangely moved from its usual impassive calm. He was an eminent London surgeon, well inured to sights of pain; but Dick Hope and he had been like brothers at school, and his sorrow touched him.

‘Well,’ said the Doctor, turning round at last, ‘I can’t see her just now, Norris; I could not trust myself. Will *you* go up? You’ve held her in your arms many a time.’

Mr Norris hesitated. He would rather have done many things than faced ‘Dick’s little Winnie’ at that moment. ‘Isn’t there any one else; any friend?’

‘No one here. There’s a lady, but she’s out of town. No; there’s no one else. Besides,—I can’t,—I’ve got an appointment, and it won’t do to keep her waiting.’ And the Doctor walked off resolutely.

‘Bother,’ said Mr Norris to himself, as he in his turn walked to the window, and looked up into the gray sky, ‘I wish Hope had got some one else; how can I tell her she’ll never walk again?’

A light step in the room made him look round. It was Lily.

‘Has papa gone out, Mr Norris?’

‘Yes; I was just going up to your sister. Will you come?’

Lily hesitated, ‘N—no, I think not. But won’t you tell me?’ she added, standing before him. ‘I’m afraid your opinion isn’t hopeful?’

'I fear there is some serious injury to the spine; but you are too good a nurse ever to let your patient see any but the bright side'

He walked past her, not caring to say more. 'I can't tackle two of them,' he muttered, as he went upstairs, 'never could stand girls in my life.'

It was a pretty room which he entered, in answer to the low, 'Come in.' All that love could do to cheer the suffering which it might not lighten, was done for Winnie Hope. A tiny fountain played in the window; rare flowers, choice casts and pictures, were all around her. How much she owed to them, perhaps many invalids could tell her, who yearn for beauty they never see. But she looked on none of these now. She only watched Mr Norris's face.

'Well,' he said cheerily, as he drew a chair beside her bed, 'Are you tired with all my pulling about?'

'Rather,' she said, 'for you *did* pull me about unmercifully. What's the result of it all, Mr Norris?'

'Why, *that*,' he said laughing, 'and so I think you had better not talk any more, Miss Winnie, but rest and go to sleep.'

But Winnie was not to be put off thus. 'I want you to tell me;' and the blue eyes looked straight into his; 'Papa promised I should know.'

'Your papa has gone out;' here Mr Norris was seized with a fit of coughing.

'Yes,' said Winnie, 'I heard him shut the door. I

think he would have come up if he had good news to tell.'

'Would not you like it from anyone else? because I've got some for you. I think you might be moved to the sofa; and that will be a pleasant change after three months of bed.'

'Very,' said Winnie, with a long breath of relief. 'Oh how I have longed for it!' Her face flushed with pleasure; but when Mr Norris, congratulating himself on his diplomacy, was just going to bid her good bye, she suddenly said; 'and when do you think I shall be able to walk again?'

'Ah, but we must go on cautiously, you know,—not attempt too much. There now,—I shan't let you talk any more; good night, good night.'

'Tell Lily,' said Winnie, as he left the room (and he thought her voice sounded more cheerful than he had yet heard it), 'that I'm going to rest awhile, and I would rather she didn't come to me.'

'I don't think she suspected,' soliloquised Mr Norris, as he went down stairs, 'I managed her beautifully.'

But Lilies, listening at the door ten minutes afterwards, heard an agony of sobs.

She herself went into her room that night with a very heavy heart. Winnie had scarcely looked up when she went to give her, as she always did, the last kiss before leaving her in charge of their old nurse, who slept beside her. But she knew she was not sleeping

as she tried to seem, for the long eyelashes were wet, and her breath came with a little sobbing catch. 'Oh! if I only knew how to comfort her,' thought poor Lily, 'if I could only bear it for her!'

How many have yearned thus! Yet, perhaps, in this also we 'know not what we ask.' We fear, as our loved ones pass into the cloud, and we would fain hold them back; but they are to see behind it the transfigured Christ.

Lily turned to her journal, unopened since that fair June evening, when she had watched the sunlight fade over the Downs, and dreamed of a future she knew not. She could not write in it to-night; but she sat awhile with the book before her, and thought. If there had been sad hours since those last words were penned, there had been some, sweet even in their sorrow, of which perhaps angels kept the record; hours, when first, upon her wistful wondering sight, there rose the vision of One like unto the Son of Man, though He spake as none might speak save the Son of God; of One who had borne upon the Cross her sin, and had risen from the grave to be her living Friend; who offered her a love, which should be to her beyond all other love, and peace beyond all thought. Very simply, with no questions and few doubts, had Lily received this 'unspeakable gift.' She could not have shown how it came to her, and indeed would never try to show.

I think we do not read much of these things in the

Bible, for the pauses of Scripture fall with a hallowing veil on all that lies between the soul and God. It is holy ground—man's foot may not tread it. Perhaps we need the hint in these days, when even those hidden things, which God Himself has sealed in silence, are dragged out into ordinary talk, and told, till their beauty, if not their reality, dies in the telling. But if we have ourselves known any such moments of glad surprise, when we have looked up out of our darkness and guilt, and seen Him, the pierced One—not afar off, but very near, speaking *to us*—then we know also how life has changed henceforth, how the living word of Jesus has 'made all things new.'

'We'll have you on the sofa to-day, pet,' said Lily, on the following morning, when she went into Winnie's room.

'We'll see,' said Winnie drearily, 'I don't think it matters much; I'm very comfortable here. But I want to write a letter, Lily; no, not pencil, give me pen and ink.'

And patiently and slowly the little fingers travelled over page after page, till Lily, watching the flushed cheek and heavy eyes, began to dread the consequences.

'What has she been doing?' said Dr Hope, coming up some hours after, when the inevitable exhaustion had set in, and Winnie was lying in her darkened room, unable to bear sound or speech.

'Only writing a letter, papa,' Winnie whispered. 'I would finish it—don't blame Lily.'

‘Very well,’ said the Doctor, gaily, ‘wilfulness must be punished.’ But when Lily and he met at tea, she was startled by his asking her abruptly, if she knew what Winnie’s letter had been about?

‘No, papa—it was to Captain Herbert.’

‘So I supposed. I believe I ought to write to him too. He must be told the state she’s in. I thought he would have been here before now; I should—.’

‘He was prevented, you know, papa, when he meant to come—and since then Winnie has always begged him to wait till she was better.’

The Doctor sighed, and drank his tea in silence. ‘I don’t like to talk to her about it.’ He said at length, ‘Oh Winnie, Winnie!’

It was not of the Winnie up stairs that he thought, but of the Winnie he had laid long ago under the elms at Alveston. The living Winnie would need her dead mother’s tenderness in this her sore straight. ‘It was nothing when they were children,’ pursued the Doctor to himself; but now—.’

There was a long silence. Some inexplicable association of ideas led him to break it, by asking Lily, ‘when Mrs Leigh was coming back.’

‘I don’t know,’ she replied, a little surprised; ‘but I believe very soon.’

‘I was thinking,’ said her father, hesitating in a way not very usual with him, ‘that she might be a comfort to Winnie—she seemed to like her.’

‘I at least did,’ said Lily, warmly. ‘I never saw any one I liked so much. I don’t think Winnie took to her then, but she might now.’

‘She might. And you—what makes her strike your fancy, Lily?’

‘I don’t know—but she looks so true—and she rested me.’

‘How?’

Lily hesitated. She rarely spoke to her papa about any but the most commonplace matters; and especially impossible, it seemed to her, to touch upon the new hope, of which these last weeks had seen the dawn. But there was time for one swift thought: ‘If thou shalt believe in thine heart, and shalt confess with thy mouth.’ And must not the confession be *first* made at her own home?

‘Because,’ she said at last, ‘Mrs Leigh seemed rested herself—and she told me how the rest had come, and where she found it.’

Dr Hope made no reply; but as he left the room, he bent over Lily’s chair, and kissed her. Lily knew that she was understood. Perhaps the day might come, when not only the common chambers of their hearts might be open to each other, but even the inner sanctuary; fast closed now.

Dr Hope sat that night by his library fire,—thinking. Days of long ago came back to him, when he and his lost Winnie had sought together that rest of which Lily had spoken, and found it—when, in the joy of that

finding, he had resolved, with Joshua—‘As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.’ In form, the resolve had been kept ; but, in the absorbing interest of his profession, and the cares of his busy life, the spirit had gradually died out of it. Another influence, too, there had been—one to work most strongly upon a man who, in his straightforward simplicity, revolted from all ‘sham’ in utter scorn and loathing. ‘I see too much humbug,’ he would sometimes say. ‘I’ve learned to distrust people who were always talking good. I am shy of all those phrases. They cover—hollowness.’ And so there had crept now and then into his ordinary talk a vein of slight satire, not of Christianity, but of Christians, which had lately struck Lily with inexpressible pain, and made her feel, that with her father it would be hardest of all to be more than a dumb witness for the Master she had learned to love.

She need not have feared. Down in the depths of a deep nature there was the same love as hers, smothered perhaps, but not extinguished. The very impatience of unreality, which called forth such bitter condemnation of it in others, testified to reality in himself. Their words might be more than their life—his life would always be more, and deeper, than his words.

So Lily had touched an answering chord ; and it was with joy, not unmixed with self-reproach, that Dr Hope heard that another hand had guided his child into the way of peace, of which he had never told her. But they would walk together henceforth ; and He, the Re-

storer, the Healer, at whose feet he laid the past, with all its shame, would give strength and guidance for the future.

'Papa,' said Lily, anxiously, as they sat at breakfast a few mornings after, 'isn't it strange there's no letter from Captain Herbert?'

'*Very*,' said the Doctor. 'I wrote to him too. I don't understand it. Ah, there's the postman. Perhaps there may be one.'

But no. 'There's one for Winnie, papa—not from him though. But I daresay she's heard the knock.'

'Ah, I'll take it up to her.'

'A letter, papa?' said Winnie, as he entered. Her wistful look went to his heart.

'Yes, Winnie, I think it's from some of your girl-correspondents, who don't know how to write.'

She threw it down impatiently. 'I can't read it—my head aches.' She closed her eyes, and lay perfectly still; but the Doctor could hear the quickened breathing, and see the tightened clutch of one little hand which lay outside the coverlet. All at once she started up. 'Papa! some one has come!'

'Very likely, my dear: no more peace for me to-day.'

'But it isn't that. It's not a patient—its—hark! it is Edward's voice!'

'My dear little Winnie,' said her father, trying to soothe her in what he thought was a mere excited fancy.

'Go down and see, won't you? I knew he'd come, as he didn't write. Do go, papa!'

The Doctor went, and found in the hall Captain Herbert.

‘I’m very glad to see you,’ he said, holding out his hand. ‘Winnie said it was your voice. Lily, my love, go up and tell her she was right; and you, come and have some breakfast.’

‘Is she here,’ said the Captain, as he walked into the dining-room.

‘She?—who?—Winnie? She hasn’t been out of bed yet. Didn’t she tell you?’

‘Why, yes—she told me of the accident, and how ill she had been. I would have come before if I could; but I somehow didn’t realise the truth till her last letter.’

The Doctor wondered if he realised it now!—a question which occupied him all the time his guest and he discussed the weather and the news of the day; while the former likewise discussed his breakfast, apparently with much enjoyment. Lily, in the midst of it, called him out.

‘Papa, Winnie wants to be moved to the sofa—may she?’

‘Is she very much set upon it? Then I suppose she must, Lily,’ he added, abruptly. ‘What do you think about this, my child? Her engagement can’t go on; and yet—’

‘Perhaps nothing need be said to-day, papa; it’s enough for her to see him. Perhaps things will settle themselves.’

‘Or, perhaps, the Captain will settle them,’ her thoughts added ; for she had a shrewd suspicion that his visit was in answer to the letter in which Winnie had left him to choose freedom, if he would. But his ‘settling’ might not be accomplished in the kindest manner possible ; and what would it do for Winnie ? Lily had no great liking for her brother-in-law elect, and was doubtful as to his handling of tender things.

‘Captain Herbert, my sister is ready to see you.’ It was nearly noon before Lily made this announcement. But the Captain had consoled himself meantime with the morning papers, rather glad than otherwise of the delay. ‘She is very weak,’ Lily explained, ‘and much exhausted this morning with being moved to the sofa. I believe you must not stay with her very long.’

‘Ought she to see me at all ?’ said the Captain, as he laid his paper aside, and stood, doubtfully, twirling his moustache.

It was an awkward business altogether. He had been thinking it over as he read, and wishing himself well out of it. Of course he could not be expected to marry a helpless invalid ; but still it was a pity. Winnie was a pretty creature, and he had been very fond of her, though he remembered a dark-haired merry Irish girl, who might, on the whole, comfort him well enough for her loss. But still he followed Lily up stairs. Whatever he thought, he gave no sign.

Winnie was lying on her couch by the window, her

cheeks paler, less rounded, but otherwise little changed. She looked so pretty and sweet, Lily thought, in her soft blue cashmere—a picture fair beyond all words in her sister's eyes, whatever she might be in her lover's. Lily stationed nurse in the room adjoining, and then left the two together. There would have been a little stab in her heart once, but to-day it was for Winnie, not for herself.

In the drawing-room she found Miss May. 'Well, my dear, how's the invalid to-day? Take care you don't grow into one yourself; you're looking quite pale; it isn't good for you to confine yourself so much. Ah, yes, I daresay you don't feel it; and nothing is too much for Winnie. That's always the way with nurses; and then from the height of their beautiful self-devotion, they come down into an illness, and there's an end of them. Now, just put on your hat, child, and come for a drive with me.'

'I can't to-day, Miss May; Captain Herbert is here.'

'Captain Herbert!' The old lady looked uneasy. 'Ah, what a pity your sister got engaged so young—really it was a pity, poor darling! I can't think what your papa was about to allow it; but then men have no ideas. I think, sometimes, if he could have found any one that would have taken charge of you when you were children—'

'Why, Miss Winter took charge of us.'

'Yes: but I don't mean in that way, my dear. I

mean as a permanency—a nice, suitable lady, that would have been a sort of finish to his establishment. I thought he would have married again directly, though he didn't make such a fuss about his first wife as some of them, especially when they mean to console themselves at the year's end. But that's over now. At least, I don't know. Stranger things happen any day; and you really want some one, you girls; so badly off for aunts as you are,—and especially now, with that Captain Herbert about.'

'Yes, I know; and papa is looking out for some one—he was talking about it last night. And, by the way, I wonder if he is thinking of Mrs Leigh. He asked me if she had come home.'

'Mrs Leigh! Well, perhaps she might; but you see it would be awkward rather, and she might be suspected of a view—.'

'A view!' said Lily, wonderingly.

'Yes, my dear, people will talk in this world, and that's one of the things that make it so difficult to live in. So I don't think Mrs Leigh would do at all—not in that capacity. But I must not stay a minute. I'm going to see if I can find a servant for my poor neighbour, Mrs Hunter. She's our curate's wife—a little useless thing, as they generally are, ministers' wives, so far as my experience goes. I wonder about it often and often, and sometimes I think it's a device to hinder their husbands from being too useful. I get quite angry now and then,

and feel as if I should like to shake them all ; and then again I say to myself, " Susan May, *you* haven't got the ordering of the world. It did very well without your meddling before you came, and it's likely to do well enough after you're gone ; so just let it alone while you're here. You needn't try to make everybody see through your old eyes." Only I can't help growling, for all that. But, my dear, as I was saying, don't confine yourself too much ; and if you want anybody to sit with Winnie, I'll come with pleasure. It's all an old woman's good for—just to be a stop-gap. Everybody has a mission now-a-days, and that's mine.'

A day or two afterwards Lily was attending in Winnie's room, trying, as best she could, to make the slow hours pass lightly, for the invalid was restless and weary, just in the state so many sufferers know,—too weak to work or read, yet needing some distraction from pain. For the most part she lay gazing through the window, which gave a view of the Downs, beautiful now, with all the peculiar loveliness of autumn. The sunshine was gleaming on leaves, which the first frost had touched and left them golden, or lying in broader patches, where the ground was a little open—so fair, so sweet in its mute, yearning prophecy, that it seemed to touch the soul also with yearning, as for a birthright of glory lost, but one day to be restored. And through the still air came the sound of children's laughter, from many a nursery group under the trees.

'Lily,' she said, suddenly, 'I think if I could only feel the grass under my feet again, and hear just once more that old sweet whisper of the wind among the leaves, I should be well! You don't know how I lie here and pine for it—just that one thing—what can't be. It's exactly the longing I used to have as a child those Christmas holidays we spent at Alveston, when we walked down by the park, and I always wanted to get inside the paling. I see it now, don't you—the patches of snow, the red heaps of beech-leaves, cushiony moss, trailing ivy, with rifts in the woodwork here and there, that show glimpses of a world of tangled grass beyond; black leafless thorns, dripping hazel twigs, with those crimson buds upon them, that are waiting for the spring—not a fairer world at all than the one we walked in outside, but for the envious park paling, and the warning to trespassers, that used to make me want to get over and be happy. If the rails hadn't been there, I should have thought the road much nicer. Hark! isn't that—Oh no, it's nothing.'

And for the fiftieth time that day, Lily watched the start of eager listening, always followed by a little smothered sigh.

Just then a maid brought a 'note for Miss Winnie,' and an announcement for Lily, of visitors in the drawing-room. 'I must go, dear. Ah, I see,'—and she glanced at the direction of the letter—'you wont miss me!'

But she was detained by a succession of callers till

late in the afternoon ; and when she went back to Winnie, her first words were—

‘I’m so vexed, darling—I thought people would never stop coming—and you have been alone all the while.’

Winnie made no answer—she hardly seemed to hear. Lily knelt down by her, and touched her. She shivered, but did not speak.

‘What is it, darling? You’ve been left too long ; and where’s nurse, I wonder? Ah, there’s papa.’ And Lily flew down stairs. Dr Hope it was not, but in the hall she confronted Mr Norris. ‘I was telegraphed here,’ he explained, ‘and having an hour to spare.—’

‘Come up stairs—come to Winnie.’

‘Some sudden shock,’ he said, briefly, after a minute’s examination of his patient ; ‘What do you know about it?’

‘Nothing,’ said Lily ; but as she spoke her eyes fell upon a letter clutched in Winnie’s hand. Mr Norris saw it too, and asked no more.

And when, hours afterwards, her father put into her hands this same letter, which she had picked up and given into his care, when Winnie’s fingers at last relaxed their hold, she did not wonder that it had so crushed the tender heart, which, till now, had but

‘Gathered the roses, and lain in the lilies of life’

‘Cold, cruel, heartless,’ she said, as she threw it on the table ; ‘but I never did like him !

'My dear Lily,' said Dr Hope, in whose character justice was a strong trait, 'don't you see that the engagement could not go on as Winnie is now?'

Lily did not see it at all. 'If I'd been a man, I wouldn't have given her up because she was helpless.'

'Hush, Lily, you're reasoning from unknown premises; being some one else, and not yourself; but it is always unsafe to argue from a hypothesis.'

'I couldn't,' persisted Lily; 'nor you either, papa! At any rate, he might have waited.'

'He might have done it in a kinder way, certainly,' said Dr Hope, scanning again the cool sentences which had burned themselves into Winnie's brain like molten lead; 'but there's one thing, Lily—a man who could write that, was never fit for Winnie. Better see her as she is, than his wife.'

Better—aye, truly! And so men say, that ashes and lava from burning volcanoes, though they may scorch for a while, do afterwards greatly enrich the fields over which they have poured. Yes, but they have killed the flowers—will these bloom again?

They were dark days which followed, both for Winnie and the two who loved her. On her, after the sharper illness, a kind of stupor seemed to settle, from which she could not be roused. She would lie whole days without speaking; or answer, when addressed, in petulant fretful words. A new book, a new flower, would be looked at listlessly, for a moment, and then turned away from.

Even Lily's tenderness vexed her, and her father's voice she could not bear. She would make no effort towards helping or amusing herself. She would not be moved to the sofa, though she sometimes murmured wearily at 'day after day of bed.' In fact, she was a very impracticable patient, to whom Dr Hope would doubtless have spoken some sharp truths if she had been any one else. But his own child, his little motherless Winnie, how could he scold her! He meant to do it every day, and every day his heart failed him. So much the worse for Winnie!

And thus the winter closed in, sadly enough. November skies were grey, and November winds were dreary. Winnie used to shudder, as she listened to them; they seemed to sigh a *Miserere* for all that might have been.

Lily was troubled about her, and with good reason; for her state of physical and mental prostration warranted the worst fears. Bright and sweet she had been when all was bright around her; but her natural character had no strength to brave a storm, and she had not learned, before the storm came, where to look for shelter. So now, when its violence had broken, she was only shattered and helpless.

'Mrs Leigh would know how to deal with her,' sighed Lily, regretfully; but Mrs Leigh, since her return to town, had moved into lodgings farther away, and Lily seldom saw her. 'If we had been poor people, she would have come to us,' she thought, with some bitter-

ness. 'Why does no one care for the trouble which money cannot help?'

But as she mused thus one afternoon, sitting in the invalid's room as usual, she was called down to see Miss May.

'Don't let her come here,' said Winnie, as she caught her name.

'Very well, dear,' said Lily, hesitating; 'I'm only afraid that she may think it unkind.'

'I don't care,' said Winnie, fretfully—for the selfishness of invalidism was rapidly growing over her—'her voice would drive me wild.'

'I wish you didn't look so like your name,' said Miss May, as Lily entered the drawing-room. 'My dear, we shall have you melting away into a snow-drift one of these days. And look at that beautiful frosty sunshine, and you not out!'

'I can't leave Winnie. She doesn't exactly want me, and yet she misses me if I am out of her sight.'

'How is she? Tell me about her?' There was not much to tell. She was 'just the same,' Lily said.

'Lily,' said Miss May, very seriously, 'if you don't mind, you'll have her always just the same.'

'I know that; but we can't make her well.' Lily's tone was a little injured.

'Of course you can't; but—nay, don't think me a monster, child. I believe she might do a great deal to—'

wards making herself well. And what are you doing with her—anything?’

‘Just letting her alone. Didn’t you tell me that it was best.’

‘Because she wasn’t ready for comfort then, and I’m not sure if she is now. Tonics are better than sedatives. I’m going up stairs to sit with her while you go out for a walk.’

‘Oh please, Miss May,’ said Lily, in utter consternation, ‘I don’t think she could bear any stranger to-day—indeed you must not.’

‘My dear Lily, can’t you trust an old woman, who has seen sixty years, and some sorrow? I won’t force the tonics down her throat.’

‘But I said she should not see you.’

‘Then you said something very foolish. I’m going up stairs this minute. No, you shan’t tell her first. I’ll make my own apologies. And, just in good time, here comes Nellie Grahame; now you shall go for a walk.’

And Lily, seeing there was no help for it, acquiesced, not without sundry misgivings.

Winnie had been lying longer alone than she liked, and was prepared to be more than a little cross, when the soft opening of the door announced, as she thought, Lily’s return to her. But it was not Lily’s slim figure which emerged from behind the curtain.

‘Miss May?’

‘Yes. I know you’re surprised to see me, and not

altogether glad ; but I sent Lily out for a walk, and I've come to be nurse in her absence—greatly against her will, as well as yours.'

Winnie could not help smiling ; but the smile soon faded.

'You're very tired, dear!' Was that Miss May's voice, so soft and low? And what new instinct taught her to detect the signs of exhaustion, which Winnie herself could not have expressed—taught her how to shade the light, and bathe the hot brow and hands—till power to be still came back in place of restlessness.—For half an hour Winnie lay in dreamy repose, and then the impulse to talk showed that she was relieved.

'I can't think how you came to be such a good nurse, Miss May?'

'If I had not learned that, child, a deal of education would have been wasted on me.'

'Education!'

'Yes, just the same you're getting now. It all goes into one's life-learning, and there'll be a place found for it some day. Some of the lessons are hard enough, little Winnie ; but perhaps they're set that we may make them come easier to others years after. I lay like you for many a month, and that's how I learned to nurse.'

'You *do* things,' said Winnie. 'Lily asks me if I *want* them.'

'Ah! but Lily will learn. Poor child, this illness is as hard for her as you.'

'As hard?'

'Yes, every bit—in some ways harder.'

'I haven't thought of that,' said Winnie, penitently. Miss May knew that.

'Mr Self is very important when one is ill—rather an overshadowing presence, sometimes apt to hide other people. But, Winnie, when are you to be moved to the sofa?'

'I don't know'—a spasm of pain came over the white face. 'I was there two or three times, and I couldn't bear it now.'

'But wouldn't it be better to try? Even if you were worse for a day or two, it would be a step gained. And it would be much more cheery for Dr Hope and Lily.'

Others again! This thought for them was new to Winnie. She lay and pondered. 'But I'm so tired always!' she pleaded, after awhile.

'Then, wouldn't it be a satisfaction to have done something worth being tired for—something to have brought just one smile into papa's face—a little brightness for Lily into these winter days? And, for yourself, don't think I don't know what I'm talking about. I remember the time when an effort like that seemed beyond *my* heroism. But I believe I shouldn't have been trotting about now that I'm an old woman—perhaps I shouldn't have been an old woman at all—if I hadn't made it.'

There was a long silence, broken only by the silvery tick of the time-piece, and the flickering of the fire.

‘Winnie,’ said Miss May at last, and in the tender voice lay the echo of years gone by, ‘I haven’t spoken of this trouble of yours, but I have felt for you in it most truly.’

Winnie winced, half inclined to resent the speech as an impertinence ; but she could not from Miss May.

‘Yes, it *is* a trial ; and though it will pass in God’s good time, yet, in the first pain, it’s hard to believe that. But look out of the window,’ she added, raising the blind a little—‘What do you see?’

‘A grey world. There isn’t a bit of brightness anywhere.’

‘Not anywhere? Look again.’

Winnie’s eyes followed hers. The view was grey enough, as she said, except where the distant woods deepened into purple ; but in the sky above there was a dash of rose and gold from the sunset out of sight. ‘Yes, I know,’ she said, thoughtfully, ‘there *is* light and warmth too ; but I don’t think that helps you much when you can only watch it out of the shadow.’

‘Not if you watch it faithlessly ; but the sunshine we can only see to-day we may feel to-morrow, and meanwhile it is good to remember the patience of hope.’

‘It’s not easy,’ said Winnie, sadly.

‘I know it. That’s one of the lessons that **are** hardest—not to be learned at all, child, except as He

teaches ; who learned, like us, by the things which He suffered. I won't speak of His comfort, because we can't tell one another how strong and deep it is ; we can only find it out from himself. But I do want you to remember, Winnie, that if God sends us sorrow, we are not to put it up on a shrine, and worship it. He means it for a consecration, but not to dreams and sighs.'

Winnie glanced up at her a look of piteous appeal.

'It's hard for you, little Winnie'—the gentle words fell like a caress—'you feel as if something had dropped out of your life, and blanks are always dreary things. But you may fill up the blank, and you are free to choose how : either with tears and vain regrets, which will make it more dreary than ever ; or with loving sacrifice and self-denial.'

'But I can't do anything. It seems to me as if everything was an effort.'

'I know. But have you considered what depends on efforts?'

'What?'

'Whether, for all the future, you will show yourself a true woman, strong to suffer, strong to act ; or whether—'

'I think I see the alternative,' Winnie broke in ; 'but, Miss May, did you ever feel ? No ! I'm talking nonsense.'

'Never mind, my dear ; that is what I do every day.'

'Well, did you ever feel as if your life wasn't worth while?'

‘Yes, I have felt it in the old unsatisfied years ; never, I think, since I came to see, that we had better have an aching void all the days of our earthly pilgrimage, than contentment with what earth gives. God showed me that, Winnie, through sorrow, from which the bitterness of death has not passed—and never will.’

She stopped, and Winnie lay quiet. She felt almost awe-struck at the glimpse of a grief, older by years than her's by days. And she had been so impatient !

‘And then,’ her old friend went on, ‘I couldn't feel any more as if life wasn't worth while, though it did seem broken off short ; or rather, as if it must be trailed out wearily, without an object. But soon I saw that the love which I never cared for before, could fill it and make it even glad ; and that He, who redeemed it from everlasting death, had some little corner for it in His great plan, and would use it in His own way. Th at was what my trouble taught me, Winnie ; and though we can't learn one another's lessons, we can help each other to read them. There, you have talked enough ; or, rather, I have. Hush !—we will have no more to-day.’

Winnie took the withered hand, and pressed it reverently. It was not for nothing that the old woman had suffered the girl's eyes to rest for one moment on this chapter of her past history.

But Winnie had to begin her lessons at the very beginning, for she did not even know the Teacher who bade her learn of Him. And His teaching came first in

her being led down into the depths—depths of self-despair and humiliation—for only through these could come the leading up again into the light. But He who passed not by the cup of bitterness because of His own suffering, will not spare the stroke which brings healing, because of His children's cry.





CHAPTER V.

CHARLIE.

LILY'S walk with Nellie Grahame was not particularly lively. Nellie was in one of those fits of abstraction in which she sometimes indulged, and to which Lily had grown too much accustomed to make any effort to rouse her, though, for her own sake, it would have been kinder to do so. Women have no business with moods; they spoil too many lives—darken too many homes. But to-day, as it happened, Nellie's mood was not without excuse.

'No; I must not come in,' she said, as they reached Dr Hope's door on their return, 'Mamma isn't well and she'll want me.'

'You are not anxious about her?' said Lily, struck by something in her tone.

'No—not exactly—but she has no strength. She took cold a month ago, and she doesn't throw it off'

‘Has she seen papa?’

‘No,’ said Nellie (the fact, that Dr Hope took no fees, giving her voice its hardest sound), ‘it wasn’t necessary, she’ll be all right again. Only I mustn’t stay, and besides it is growing dark.’

Lily narrated the conversation to her father at dinner. ‘I don’t suppose there’s much the matter,’ was his reply; ‘she always has complaints enough on hand to stock an hospital, but I’ll go and see her this evening if I can, though really’—the rest of the sentence sounded very like, ‘it’s an awful bore.’

Accordingly two or three hours later, the Doctor sallied forth to the quiet unfashionable street where the Grahames resided. Nellie was alone in the little parlour when he entered, apologising for his late intrusion.

‘Mamma has gone to her room,’ said Nellie, ‘but I daresay she’ll see you.’

She went to prepare her mother for the visit; and the Doctor, left alone, glanced at the bare poor furniture, and compared it mentally with the appointments of his own luxurious library. He was struck, too, with Nellie’s languid step as she returned, and took note of her pale cheeks and heavy eyes.

His interview with Mrs Grahame was soon over. The real state of the case he saw at once, and he was in no mood for either moanings or moralisings.

‘There’s not much wrong,’ he said, as he joined Nellie again, and drew his chair to the fire (it was a very

small one), 'but she's weak; she wants making up; good food, and plenty of it.'

He saw Nellie's brow contract as he spoke, and her hands clasped each other till the fingers (how thin they were), grew white with the tension.

'Hasn't Charlie seen to her?' the Doctor went on, 'where is he, by-the-bye?'

'He—he hasn't come in yet.'

'Is he generally late?'

'Not always. I suppose he is kept at the hospital.'

The Doctor supposed nothing of the kind, but he made no remark.

'You don't look over strong, Nellie. I shall have to take you in hand too.'

'I'm perfectly well,' said Nellie; 'I'm tired sometimes.' She leaned her head on her hand wearily. Life was a hard thing for Nellie Grahame.

'How are the pupils going on?'

'I have only two, and I shall lose one at Christmas. I don't hear of any more. There are so many doing the same thing. It's an over-stocked market.'

'This daily-governessing seems unsatisfactory work?'

'Very;' her tone said, 'I don't need to be told that.'

'Could you not take a permanent situation?'

'No; I'm not accomplished. I can only teach little children. I should gain nothing by being nursery-governess, and I should lose—my freedom.'

The Doctor laughed, and yet his fatherly heart ached for the girl. His own Lily might have been in the same plight.

‘And there’s nothing that women can do,’ she said at last, fixing her eyes on him, ‘except this miserable teaching. It isn’t miserable—it is the noblest, highest work of all—if you have a vocation for it; but if you have not, it grinds down soul and body. ‘Oh, if I were a man!’

‘What would you do?’ said Dr Hope, too true a man himself to smile at her, as some might.

‘I’d give women work. I’d break down the barriers (a man’s hand could do it) which we only bruise our own hands in trying to move.’

‘I’m not sure that you would be doing a wise thing. They are a shelter, those same barriers, as well as a hindrance. And besides, what do you women want with more worlds than your own to manage? Isn’t it enough for you?’

‘Too much,’ said Nellie sighing, ‘I want no more, at any rate. I’ve no sympathy with that clamour about rights; I only want the right to work. You see,’ she added, ‘if I’d been a girl of fifteen, it would have been different; there’s hope for the young ones, but the door is shut when you are five and twenty. You can’t do anything that needs learning then.’

‘How would you like to keep a shop?’

‘Keep a shop!’ Nellie gasped in utter amazement, and then sat a long while silent. ‘Would he have pro-

posed such a thing to his own daughters?' was her first indignant thought, 'yet I am every bit as gently born as they.' But her good sense immediately put that aside.

'What sort of shop!' she asked, at last.

'Suppose a stationer's.'

'It would need stocking.'

'But if that difficulty could be got over!'

'I can't tell,—I should have to think.'

'Well, think then, and let me know the end of your thinking,' said Dr Hope, rising and holding out his hand, 'and remember,' he added, as he held her's for a moment, 'that what your father's friend can do to help you, will be done with pleasure.' But the kind words were too much: there came a burst of hysterical sobs, which all Nellie's bravery could not keep down.

'I'm so ashamed of myself,' she said at last.

'You're tired out. I'm not sure that you're fit to do anything but be nursed.'

'Yes I am,' said Nellie eagerly, 'if I could do anything, I should be well; it is the hopelessness of doing nothing—having nothing to do. But I'm better now,' and she rose from the chair into which she had sunk, with a gesture that seemed to dismiss her visitor. Nellie was one of the women born to be queens.

Going up to her mother after Dr Hope's departure, Nellie found her in the pleasant little excitement, which was always produced for her by anything in the shape of a medical visit. Poor lady, she was not of much im-

portance to the world in general, and it was something to be the object of undivided attention for at least ten minutes. She began now detailing symptoms and directions in a brisker tone than Nellie had heard that day.

‘Oh, and I’m to have some beef-tea—strong, Nellie—he laid such stress on that, and some good claret or madeira. We must order some to-morrow!’

‘Yes, mother,’ said Nellie, absently. She was wondering whether her mother ever could be made to comprehend the state of their finances.

She comprehended Nellie’s tone, however, and was irritated by it. ‘There, I don’t want anything more. I won’t keep you longer. Good night.’

Nellie’s ears told her that she had gone wrong. There was a grievance in her mother’s voice and she knew that sooner or later she would hear of it. She busied herself in arranging the room, and tried two or three ineffectual attempts at talking, but the responses were very short. Just as she was about to leave, however, the grievance shaped itself into words.

‘I thought you would have been anxious to hear the Doctor’s opinion; but it doesn’t matter. He evidently thinks I am very weak, so you won’t be troubled with me long.’

‘Don’t, mother,’ said Nellie, stooping to kiss her in a sudden passion of penitence, ‘I am so sorry if I vexed you. I was only thinking—’

'Ah you'll have something to think of, one day, Nellie, when I'm with those that are gone. It will soon come!'

Nellie was too well accustomed to this strain to be in general much disquieted by it. She had heard it at intervals for years, and comforted herself by thinking that when her mother was really likely to die, she would not say so much about it. But to-night, weary and sick-hearted as she was, the words seemed to have an anxious meaning, especially with an almost empty purse. It was some time before she could explain that her thoughts, too, had been of claret and beef-tea, and the utter impossibility of getting them.

'But you *shall* have them, mother dear,' and she looked up with glowing eyes.

'It's easy for you to say that,' said the invalid, petulantly, 'you know you could get them any moment if you would only—.'

Nellie's brow darkened again. She hid her face in her hands. 'Not that, mother, anything but that!'

'Well, my dear, I must say I think you have some very absurd romantic ideas. Here you might have, any day, comfort, not to say wealth, and good social position for yourself, and the power of supplying your mother's wants in sickness, perhaps even prolonging life—and—'

'And a husband whom I could not love,' added Nellie.

'That's just because you won't try.'

'I don't believe in love that won't come without trying.'

'Don't talk nonsense, child ; Mr Hathaway is a great deal too good for you.'

'He is,' said Nellie, with sudden fire, 'he is so good, that I couldn't live with him. I mean,' she added, seeing her mother's look of horror ; 'he is so noble and true himself, that his very presence would scorch me if I were living a perpetual lie.'

'My dear, I wish you would not use such exaggerated language, it's a very bad habit to acquire. "A perpetual lie!" What can you possibly mean?'

'I mean this, mother, that if I became Mr Hathaway's wife, not loving him, I should be guilty of the worst kind of unfaithfulness. But we won't discuss that point any more ; it is settled.'

'Well,' said the invalid querulously, 'it is your doing, and you must take all the consequences for yourself and me too. I know I'm sinking—.'

'But you shall not, mother. You shall have all you want—indeed you shall. I'll get everything very soon. I have thought of a plan.' And with as much diplomacy as she knew how to use, Nellie unfolded her scheme, of the shop.

Her mother listened in blank amazement. The very idea was beyond her comprehension. Nellie mistook her silence for consent, and was encouraged to go into the details which her own mind, half practical, half ima-

ginative, had already grasped. But she was soon undeceived. 'I tell you, Nellie, it shall not be. I will not have a daughter of mine so degrade herself.'

'Mother, it is no degradation ; if I can get work that brings no slur on my gentility, I would do it, but I can't. Isn't it better—more honourable, if you like—that I should do this, than that we should—'

'Should what ?'

'Get into debt.'

'It is no more than others do. There's your last quarter's salary never paid at the Nortons.'

'No,' said Nelly, bitterly, 'I think of it every time I see their carriage roll by. If it had, you wouldn't have been in need of common necessities to-night. All the more reason that I should pay my washing bill, when perhaps my laundress has a sick child and wants beef-tea for it, as I do for you. Mrs Norton doesn't know that a few pounds may mean health and life : I do.'

But Mrs Grahame could not appreciate this reasoning. 'It was different for people of that sort,' she persisted, 'and, at any rate, the shop was not to be thought of. A child of her's behind a counter ! She would rather—'

'You would rather,' said Nellie at last, 'that I should sell myself, body and soul, into a slavery that would be worse than death, as thousands of women do for the sake of what they call a home. You would rather that I should stand before God and darken my soul with

falsehood, by promising to love where I cannot, and obey where I will not. Mother, *that* would be degradation (not the other) and worse!’

She left the room then and went back to the parlour, pacing it for nearly an hour. She had spoken truth—but she knew she had spoken it wrongly, and her conscience was ill at ease.

She took up her sewing at last—late though it was—after going to the kitchen to tell their old servant that she need not sit up. ‘I will wait for Mr Charlie myself,—I daresay he is detained.’

She had said the words so often, that they seemed now to utter themselves. Yet when she re-entered the sitting-room, and recalled the significant shake of Martha’s cap-strings, she was fain to lay down her work and cover her face with her hands, in the agony of a wrestling with pain which every day grew sorer. Her love for Charlie was strong as her very life—and was Charlie going wrong?

Long, long she waited, till the street without grew still, and the clock of a neighbouring church had chimed an hour past midnight. The little fire in the grate had burned out, and Nellie dared not replenish it. Charlie would go to bed when he came, and for herself it was no matter. Cold was no new thing to her, and she knew what hunger was too, now and then.

At last there were footsteps on the flags, and boisterous voices struck upon her ear. She held her breath

and listened—Charlie was among them. A few minutes more, and he was in the room, grumbling that she had sat up. ‘Why can’t you leave me alone to come in when I like?’

‘I couldn’t sleep if I were in bed—and you may as well have something more cheery to look at than an empty grate.’

‘I don’t know that you are more cheery, and at any rate, I can’t stay to look at you. Here—good night.’

He bent down to kiss her as usual, his hot breath almost scorching her cheek.

That kiss was one of the influences in Charlie Grahame’s life which still held it under a spell of good. He half drew back as his lips touched her’s. Her pure womanhood shamed him.

‘Charlie,’ said Nellie, laying her hand on his, ‘do you think you could sometimes come in a little sooner?’

Anything more—a touch less light, a tone less low—Charlie would have resented, but the very gentleness disarmed him.

‘Well, but I say, Nellie, I hate coming in before mother’s in bed; she preaches and scolds so. If it hadn’t been for her preaching and scolding —.’

‘Hush,’ said Nellie.

‘Well, it’s true. I tell you, Nellie, if she had stopped in when we were younger, you and I, instead of going out to those everlasting meetings and things, and let us have some kind of amusement and pleasure at home, it

would have been better for me to-day. I won't hush. I know you think the same, though you are too strait-laced to say so.'

'Well—but she is very weak. Dr Hope has been here to-night, and he says so.'

'Dr Hope? There's another bother!' What the 'bother' was, Charlie did not explain. 'What did he say about mother?'

'He says she is very weak—wants plenty of nourishment.'

'Well,' said Charlie, 'that's an easy prescription to follow. I'll call and order some wine for her to-morrow as I go to town.'

'Can you pay for it, Charlie?'

'N—no, I'm afraid I can't conveniently this time. Can't you—out of the housekeeping?'

Nellie showed him a purse, empty but for one sovereign—and that must last till Christmas. 'You know there have been losses,' she said quietly,—'that money in the L—— Bank; and I have only two pupils.'

Charlie stared. His brain was not particularly clear, but he could see that solitary sovereign, and hear it too, for that matter. It had something to say to him. He got up and walked uneasily about the room. Did it occur to him that these two women, whose stay he should have been, were without common necessities, for want of the money he spent on scents and gloves? Yet Charlie was *only* thoughtless. He had *only* never

learned to disguise the unmanliness of self-indulgence. Alas for the days—days of luxury and evil selfishness, when such an *only* could find toleration?

‘Charlie,’ said Nellie at last (it was not, perhaps, a good time to speak, but she might not find another opportunity), ‘I must do something. And it must be something which will keep me at home too, for mamma cannot be left.’

Charlie did not reply. The state of the family funds had never dawned upon him till now. He knew, indeed, his mother’s income—but it had not occurred to him to connect this sum with the practical need of every-day. He did not realise that the expenses of his education, though greatly aided by Dr Hope, had been barely met by self-denyings, of which he never heard, and that, in faithful remembrance of debts contracted at that time, one luxury after another was disappearing from the simple dinner-table, except on days when he dined at home; and that Nellie was facing these November winds in a shawl which they pierced like paper. His own salary, he would have said, sufficed for his own expenses, but, in a heedlessness about money which seems born with some natures, he did not remember that these expenses, though they perhaps led him into no positive wrong, except the wrong of selfishness, were of a kind which he would have been a nobler man if he had resolutely refused.

So it was not altogether pleasant to hear Nellie talk

of 'doing something.' The satire upon himself was too keen.

'What did you think of doing?' he forced himself to ask.

'Keeping a shop,' was Nellie's quiet reply.

Keeping a shop! Charlie stared in dumb surprise.

'Yes—I had been wondering and wondering what I could do. Dr Hope suggested it to-night, and I see that it would be the wisest plan.'

'Dr Hope!' Charlie's face reddened with anger. 'I'll teach him how to insult my sister! I'll throw all his favours back—I'll —.'

Nellie waited till the torrent of words spent itself, and her brother relapsed into his moody pacing of the floor. Then she got up, and linked her arm in his, showing, as she tried to make herself believe, that she leaned on him for more than physical support; but that delusion was fast passing.

'Charlie,' she said then, 'think of that one sovereign and mother's illness. She's almost sinking for want of proper nourishment. I shall lose another pupil at Christmas—and—.'

'But it's not to be thought of,' he interrupted angrily, 'I tell you, it would spoil all my prospects of getting on. How would it sound, do you think, for Dr Grahame to have a sister keeping a shop! Bah!'

'I have thought of that. I know it would not help you,—so much for the world's absurdity. But you are

not Dr Grahame yet, Charlie, and meanwhile we must live—or die,’ she added, suddenly slipping her hand from his arm and sinking on the sofa. Poor Nellie! She could have been brave against most else, but this glimpse of selfishness, which she had tried not to see, was too much for her.

But Charlie was not all selfish. The drooping figure, the moan of utter weariness and despair, touched the better part of him. He would have liked to put his arm round her, with one of the old caresses of their childhood. But somehow she seemed too far away from him; she, in her meek stedfast endurance; and he—he dared not think of what he was! However, he would say nothing of all that. He would go back to ‘the shop.’

‘You couldn’t, Nellie; don’t you see the absolute impossibility of it? Why, you would be exposed to —.’

‘Nothing but what thousands of young women are exposed to every day—nothing more than I could protect myself against, I hope,’ she added, almost haughtily. ‘Besides, I would have some one with me.’

‘But it cannot be, Nellie—it shall not be. Listen—I’ve been a naughty boy, I know I have,’ he sat down beside her, and in a moment her arm was round his neck. ‘Hush, Charlie, hush!’—for she couldn’t bear to hear him accuse himself.

‘But I’m going to be good now—I won’t say any

more about it, for you cannot have overmuch faith in me—eh, Nellie? But you'll see. I'm determined to cut that set of fellows altogether and stick to work. And then you won't need to do anything.'

'But, Charlie, I must.'

'No—you must not. I won't have it.' He spoke with one of the sudden flashes of determination, to which Nellie always gave in. 'Try for a while, and see.'

And so that troubled evening came to an end. But Nellie's last thought was not of Charlie's promise, or her mother's danger; nor yet of Frank Hathaway, though she did think of him, with a kind of half-pitiful wish that she could end her perplexities by accepting what he was only too eager to give her. But it was not the pity which was akin to love; for another face was in her dreams, and she awoke murmuring another name.

The following afternoon was a half-holiday for Nellie, and she spent it in a walk across Arlingford to see Mrs Leigh. The two had drawn curiously together since that bright June day when they first met. Nellie had no friend besides except Lillas Hope—as yet hardly reckoned such. She was not a girl to make them. To care for others, but not to be greatly cared for by them, seemed the story of her life. And she would never have sought Edith Leigh, had not the latter sought her.

Indeed, she had held back from the meeting, until, at last, yielding to an attraction which she could not resist, she opened all her heart, and gave out its wealth of love.

For a wonder Mrs Leigh was at home, and her welcome made Nellie forget the drizzle through which she had made her way to it. She sat, too happy to say much, while Mrs Leigh removed her cloak and hat: it was so pleasant to be cared for!

‘Why did you never write to me while I was away?’ her friend asked, when she had established Nellie in a low easy chair, and sat down to her work opposite.

‘I did.’

‘Then I never got the letter.’

‘Very likely not; I put it in the fire.’

‘Oh, Nellie, why?’

‘Well, for a long while I couldn’t find time to write, and then, when I could get the afternoon to myself and you, all my thoughts ran riot over the paper, and so the sheets were condemned to the flames as nonsense, and I hoped that, another day, I might possibly be less silly and more coherent. And besides—’

‘Besides what?’

‘Let me come nearer—I can’t talk to you there, half across the room—I want this low stool. There—that will do. Well, I had been thinking off and on, that I was only one of the many people whom you had done good to, and that you would just look at my letter as

one among others. Yes, it was naughty, I know ; but I get so cross sometimes at home ! I seem to live in an atmosphere of diluted pins and needles, and I get prickly all over myself.

There was no answer, except the touch of soft fingers among her hair—so soft they seemed to draw the prickles away. By-and-bye Mrs Leigh took up her work again, and Nellie watched her in silence. Then she burst forth—

‘I couldn’t live your life, Edith !’

‘Couldn’t ! that’s a strong word. Human creatures can live under hard conditions. “Folks takes a deal o’ killing,” as an old woman said to me one day.’

‘Well, I couldn’t, and should feel like a wild thing chained, and should pull at the chain till I broke it—or myself. Lily Hope said yesterday what a peaceful life it must be. But fancy looking on through years of peace like that—grey peace—without any colour in it.’

Mrs Leigh laughed. ‘I don’t feel as if my life were grey.’

‘It isn’t to you—it’s only what it would be to me—like an everlasting Sunday.’

Her friend’s eyes were bent on her for a moment with an expression which Nellie could read very well. Her own dropped and filled.

‘Ah I know,’ she sighed ; ‘if one had the peace !’

‘Christ will give it, Nellie.’

‘No, not to me. Besides, I’m not sure that I want it. There’s so much giving up.’

‘Nay,’ said Mrs Leigh, ‘it is receiving, not giving.’

‘But I hate all those rules about doing this, and not doing that ; going here, and not going there. They would make my life miserable.’

‘I think they would make any life miserable. But, Nellie, there is such a thing as love, which supersedes rules. Listen,’ she added, reaching out her hand for a book which lay near ; ‘here is something I like so much.’

“We understand the law of honour among men of the world, and the law of etiquette among its women, and they would as soon die as violate it. They cannot define its provisions very exactly, yet they feel it, and live by it. They are not afraid of being brought before any court, or incurring any penalties, but they are not the less careful in its observance on that account. Now, the Christian law is exactly of this nature. There are many customs, and observances, and amusements in the world, that are not direct violations of its statutes, but which no Christian would enter into, or would enjoy if he did ; and in proportion as we grow in the Christian life, our appreciation of this law becomes finer and higher ; so that what we may do in some of the lower stages, we find to be very distasteful and unbecoming as we advance.”

‘Yes, I like that,’ said Nellie, when she had finished. ‘It’s true, too, though I don’t see the truth of it yet ;—

there's a thicket of difficulties to be worked through before one reaches that point. And, after all, one knows so little !

‘ So little ! And in many things we must be content to wait, and let God teach us, step by step.’

‘ Yes ; but when people say that, settled comfortably in their own nest, I wonder if they ever think of the world of struggling human kind outside—of hearts that are crying out in their pain—crying blindly in the darkness, for light—only for light—and it never comes.’

‘ Dear Nellie, there was One who said, “ He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” ’

Nellie thought of the words as she plodded home again through the November drizzle—thought of them as she came where she might choose two ways to Baker Street, both almost equally near. She had hardly hesitated before, but that talk seemed to make the choice difficult. She went a little way down one street, and then stopped and turned.

‘ No, I will not. If that “ light of life ” may ever have any meaning for me, I will not lose the hope of it, even for—. But after all, the earthly light is sweet—I might have both—.’

So she turned again, quieting her conscience by an imagined necessity that she should go this way to order something for her mother. She had her reward. The

bow and smile she looked for—the lingering talk of pleasant nothings—the glance of two dark eyes—and then, when she was alone for the night, the old despairing moan over weakness, for which she despised herself. ‘No “light of life” for me,’ she murmured—‘I am out in the dark with the night, and I will not have the chain broken which keeps me there.’





CHAPTER VI.

A SURPRISE.

IT was Christmas Eve ;—bright frost out of doors, and holly and ivy within. They were wreathed round all the pictures in the Hopes' drawing-room, which wore a festive look that had to do with something beyond Christmas.

Winnie had been wheeled into it for the first time since her accident, and Lily was hovering about her,—her joy only damped by the look in Winnie's eyes as they wandered drearily over the familiar things which, for her, could only bring back 'memories of the last time.' But her smile was very patient, and now and then her laugh came as merrily as ever.

Lily herself was somewhat stirred from her usual quiet, though nothing would ever bring her into the nervous restlessness which excitement works in some natures. She only seemed a little anxious about the arrangement of the tea equipage,—which was laid as if for travellers

from a journey ;—only listened now and then, as if some passing carriage might draw up and stop. And Winnie, who on her sofa was looking over a portfolio of photographs, would sometimes listen to. ‘They can’t be here yet,’ said Miss May, who was in the room ; ‘the train is only just due, and it’s a long drive from the station. But it is time for me to be off, at any rate.’

‘It seems too bad, Miss May,’ said Winnie ; ‘to let you go before they come.’

‘Much better, my dear, much better ; you don’t want other people at such a time. Not that I’m exactly *other people* ! Being always one of the family, in a way. But you won’t need me so much now.’

‘We shall,’ said Winnie, trying to twist round so as to get a view of her old friend’s face, for between her and Miss May a wonderful friendship had sprung up during these last weeks ; ‘nobody could ever take your place,—nobody need ever try.’

‘Oh, well my dear,—but you’ll want some one after the old woman’s gone ; and I’m glad, *very*, that things have turned as *they* have,—though I was taken by surprise, I must say.’

‘I don’t believe it yet,’ said Winnie, rather petulantly ; ‘and that’s just the part I don’t like. The idea of our never knowing till a week before, and then everything to be hurried on so fast, and got over before one could draw breath.’

‘Much better, much better,’ again said Miss May ;

‘there wasn’t time for anybody to come and pity you before hand, till you fancied yourselves martyrs, and got ready to martyrize somebody else. Many a home has been spoiled just because of other tongues; buzzy buzzing things,—that won’t let people alone till they shake themselves into their plans. But I’ve no fears for you.’

Neither of the girls spoke. Lily’s smile was answer enough for her, and so perhaps was Winnie’s silence. Miss May bent over her to kiss good-night, but Winnie held her fast to look at one and another of the photographs she was turning over.

‘I want to show you one I like so much. Papa brought it me the other day. Ah, there it is.’

It was one of singular beauty, suggested by the story of Francesca da Rimini, in Canto V. of the *Inferno*, and underneath were the words,—

‘Nessún maggior dolore,
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice,
Nella misèria.’

‘How beautifully Tennyson gives that thought,—

“What a sorrow’s crown of sorrow
Is, remembering happier things.”

‘I don’t know about Tennyson,’ said Miss May; ‘he’s beyond me altogether. And I don’t think that’s true.’

‘Don’t you?’

‘No. It seems so at first, but the longer one lives, the more one sees that the thought of past happiness is

a joy for ever,—like a bird nestling in one's heart,—a warm, living thing, which none can take from you. The future you expect may never come, or when it comes, you may hardly know it for the thing you longed for,—but the past is your own.'

'Yes,' said Winnie, dreamily; '*that* must be beyond the spoiler's touch; perhaps it is true.'

'I know it's true, child,—so will you when you've seen forty more years. But before we can feel that it's true, we must learn that we are not leaving light behind,—that it lies around us and before us brighter each day. And after all, what we most yearn for is not lost in the saddest sense. Such loss is where there is no consciousness of it. Good-bye. Yes; you'll have a happy Christmas, I know.'

'I think we shall,' said Lily, kneeling by her sister's side after the old lady had gone. Winnie nestled her head on her shoulder, but she did not feel so sure of the happiness. She only whispered,—'I've got *you*! But there they are, Lily; you must go down and meet them.'

Lily shrank back. 'I can't go. And yet I must. Papa will think it so unkind.'

But while she hesitated, Dr Hope entered, bringing with him Mrs Leigh—now Mrs Hope.

She came forward a little shyly, as if not quite sure of her welcome. It was easier for her to take the girls into her empty mother-heart, than to be allowed a mother's place in theirs. She knew that well.

The meeting was rather constrained. Lilius, as usual, when strongly moved, was very cold and stiff, and the consciousness of it made her ten times worse. Winnie could not do much in the way of demonstration, even if she had been inclined, which she by no means was. Dr Hope looked a little vexed; and his wife, though she strove to hide it, a little distressed. It seemed an unfortunate beginning; 'and all my fault,' as Lily sorrowfully reflected, 'If I could only just seem what I am, instead of something quite different!'

However, the evening wore away, as even the longest will. Winnie was wheeled back to her room, and Lily, after seeing her settled, turned into the drawing-room as usual, for the five minutes talk which, since her father and she had been drawn gradually nearer by their common care for Winnie, had become to her the happiest time of the day. He was standing by his wife's chair, and they were evidently in earnest conversation. Lily quietly bade good-night, and left the room. 'They don't want me,' she thought,—as she gained her own, and threw herself in the bed in a passion of tears. 'Oh Papa, Papa! And I can never be necessary to him any more!'

But when she had cried herself quiet, and sat down at last by the fire, there came a low tap at the door. Thinking it a summons to Winnie, who was perhaps worse for the excitement of the night, she answered it in some trepidation. But there stood Mrs Hope.

‘May I come in? I could not sleep without seeing you again.’

‘Yes, come,’ said Lily placing a chair which she did not take. Lily ventured no more, conscious of tell-tale eyes, and only feeling that ‘everything was very difficult.’ Mrs Hope seemed to think so too.

‘Lily, she said at last, putting an arm round her with sudden impulse, ‘I did feel so sorry for you, when you left us just now.’

‘Don’t,’ said Lily, eagerly; ‘I’m glad;—at least,—I mean, I shall be.’

‘I know it’s a great trouble for you. It would have been for me,—but it shall be as light as I can make it.’

Lily kissed her for all answers,—a kiss which meant many things. And thus the two sealed their compact.





CHAPTER VII.

DIFFICULTIES.

NEVERTHELESS the months which followed were not quite easy, either for Mrs Hope or Liliás. The latter found, or thought she found, that her stepmother was a different person from her friend. It was one thing to like her at a distance 'better than any one she had ever seen,' and another to maintain the same opinion in the close, matter-of-fact contact of every-day life. New lights come out in a character, as one's point of view changes.

Mrs Hope might have said the same thing of Liliás with as much reason. They only tried one another, as two excellent and conscientious people will sometimes contrive to do, because of their very conscientiousness. Each was so anxious to give up—so desirous to avoid the least shadow of collision—that between them they raised an atmosphere of scruples, in which they could

neither breathe nor move freely. They had faith in each other, however, and this helped them to have patience. It was their stay, through that uncomfortable process of settling together, in which they might else have lost heart. The Doctor had a dim perception of the state of things, but he comforted himself with thinking it would all come right in the end. Which it did.

But Lily felt as if *she* would never come right. Whether from mere physical reaction after the long strain of her anxiety for Winnie, or from some other unexplained cause, she was certainly, as she herself said, 'all crossness and irritation.' For one thing, she had no settled occupation. Her house-keeping duties had been superseded, and no others were found for her but such as she made for herself. She planned a certain amount of practising, drawing, and study, to fill up the days, but they did not fill her life. She went through them without much heart, though she tried to remember that they might all be turned to account some day, and that, meanwhile, the highest motive might consecrate them. But still it was very difficult. She looked at Mrs Hope on the one hand, busy and content, and at Winnie on the other, chosen at least to suffer, and felt as if she could envy either.

Dr Hope noticed her pale looks and listless ways, and concluded that she wanted 'air and exercise.' It would have been better if he had found her some object for the exercise. Young ladies condemned to walking

that ends in nothing, are much to be pitied members of society.

'I can take either of you for a drive this afternoon,' he said one day, as he rose from the luncheon-table; 'will you come, Lily?'

It was some time since he had asked her, and Lily, who was in a perverse mood, concluded that he would not do so now if he could help it. Of course he would rather have Mrs Hope! So she said very coldly, 'I don't care about it, thank you. Mamma had better go.'

'No, Lily. I've been out every day for nearly a week; you must not let me monopolise all the drives.'

But Lily repeated that 'she didn't care—she would stay with Winnie.'

'No, you will not stay with Winnie,' said her father, authoritatively. 'I insist on your going out, whether you drive or walk.'

He left the room, and Lily studied her plate to hide her tears. There was nothing to make them come, but they did.

'Wouldn't you like to drive, dear?' said Mrs Hope, without looking at her.

She would have liked it very much, but she liked rather better to martyrize herself; so she only said, 'She didn't mind, to-day. It was fine, and she could walk.'

'But I think your papa was disappointed, Lily. I know he wished you to go, for he said so this morning.'

‘Oh,’ said Lily, ‘I’m so sorry. I—I thought—I mean—I didn’t know that he wanted me.’

‘Well, never mind, dear—he would see you did not care to go—he would think you had something else to do.’

‘But I haven’t; and I *did* care to go. Those drives with papa used to be so happy—’

Mrs Hope did not notice the insinuation, but she made herself notice what was growing to be a serious fault in Lily’s character. ‘My dear, isn’t it a pity that you don’t express what you really wish? There is such a thing as a morbid fear of saying what one likes, which makes it difficult for others not to go against it, in sheer ignorance. Have you ever noticed that people who will not make a choice, are most exasperating to their friends’ patience?’

‘I thought you wanted to go,’ said Lily, with heightened colour.

‘But when I refused, and when your papa asked you, it would have been better to believe that we both meant it. People who live together may make themselves very miserable by always *supposing* this and that—not trusting one another’s word. But, at any rate, you will go now?’

‘No; I told papa I should not.’

Mrs Hope said no more, and Lily went upstairs to prepare for her walk. She did not see the wistful look which was turned on her as she left the room, or hear the sigh with which her mamma sat down to her writing-

table. Had she been wrong after all? Had she only brought dissension and misunderstanding into the little circle which she would fain have blessed? Had she made one of those mistakes in life which can never be set right? They were not pleasant questions to face, but she could not put them away from her. She could only cry, 'If I have erred, let *me* bear the penalty.' And strength came with the self-sacrifice of such a prayer.

Lily, meanwhile, was putting on her hat in no pleasant humour. She would have liked to think she 'had got a lecture;' but she could not allow herself such unfairness. And the sore place, where the words were rankling, showed plainly enough that they were needed.

'We have got wrong, and we shall never get right,' she sighed. 'We shall only go on irritating one another, and papa will be unhappy, and home will never be home again.'

But she must try to get out of the house before the carriage would be at the door; so she hurried her dressing, and then looked into the drawing-room to see if Winnie wanted anything. She found her absorbed in the interest of a new pattern; not caring much to be interrupted, except that she asked her to call at the Harpers for a book. 'She doesn't need me,' thought Lily—'nobody does now!' It was unreasonable and wicked, she knew; but the more she told herself so, the worse she felt;—dissatisfaction with herself, being

reflected on other people. So at last she ceased to struggle, and walked on, without thinking. And, turning the corner of a street, she met Nellie Grahame. 'Going to your pupils?'

'Yes, I'm late.' And Nellie passed on, with her brisk light step.

'She's got an object in life,' thought Lily. 'I wish I had! Anything better than this treadmill round of doing nothing.'

The same longing rose, even more strongly, when she reached the Harpers, and found Mary holding a little school of her brothers and sisters, while beside her stood a large basket of socks to be mended. Mary dismissed the children, but she must not dismiss her needle. It worked in and out while she talked; and as Lily watched, she thought the fingers that held it looked very thin and white.

'How is Mrs Harper?' she asked.

'She's not down stairs yet. She doesn't get on very well this time.'

'Get on!' said Lily; why, is there another baby?'

'Yes; didn't you know? She's a month old!'

'I heard, but I had forgotten;—I'm so sorry,' said Lily, in apology.

Mary looked as if the idea of any one forgetting an event so important in her world, were incomprehensible. But just then a little face peeped in at the door.

P'eas Ma'y, se's torn her sock!'

'Oh, Chrissy,' Mary almost groaned, as a wee thing of three toddled up to her, displaying a grave rent in its print skirt; well-mended already, Lily perceived.

'Se fell and hurt herthelf,' she added, showing likewise a bruise in one round elbow,—evidently, however, a secondary matter to the torn frock.

'Is that the youngest?' said Lily.

'No; there's one between this and baby—poor little Bertie, his teeth make him so cross.'

Screams overhead attested this fact. 'I must go to him,' said Mary, starting up. 'He'll kill poor mamma. Would you mind coming upstairs? She'd like to see you, and it would do her good.'

They went—Chrissy being by the way deposited in Lucy's care, who was found curled up in a corner of another room, with one of the few children's books the house afforded.

'I never knew how Lucy learned to read,' said Mary. 'I don't think she was ever taught. It's her great trouble that I can give her so few lessons.'

A thought darted through Lily's mind, but she could not speak of it then, for on the stairs they met two boys playing at 'horses;' and in the din her voice would have been lost. But Mary's penetrated it.

'Boys, boys, be quiet! Poor mamma's head aches so. Won't you go out for a walk, Phil?' she added, laying hold of the elder, 'only for half-an-hour, mind, and then I shall be ready for lessons again.'

'I've lost my cap,' shouted Phil, 'a fellow threw it into a tree in the square, and it stuck there.'

'Oh, Phil, and you haven't another! Do go and try to get it down.'

'Can't,' persisted Phil, 'if it would come a good wind perhaps—; but I shall have to sit at the bottom of the tree and watch for it.'

'Well, at any rate, try to keep Harry quiet for mamma's sake.'

'All right,' shouted the boy from the bottom of the stairs, in a voice which made Lily's ears ring; 'but I say, Mary, don't be in a hurry for lessons.'

'He isn't like Lucy,' said his sister, 'one cannot keep him steady at anything for ten minutes. He says he's going to be a sailor, and "what's the use of lessons!" And this afternoon he was harder than ever to manage. Do you know what it is when days come that are "cut on the cross?"'

Lily had thought she knew very well, but her 'cross' days were nothing to this.

Mrs Harper's room was reached at last. She looked flushed and weary, rocking her baby's cradle with one hand, while the other arm held 'next to baby,' whom the young nurse could not quiet. Mary sent her to take the two little girls out, and herself took possession of Bertie.

'Mamma!' she said, indignantly, 'you should not nurse him.'

'He cries so, poor fellow, it does me more harm to hear him.'

The screams grew quieter as Mary laid the little hot cheek against her own, and began to pace the room, singing a low lullaby. Lily turned to the mother.

'You look so tired. I'm sure this is too much for you.'

The worn face said 'yes,' but she only smiled. 'I ought to have been down stairs by this time, but I've been kept back. It's a great comfort to be able to do without nurse, however;—she went yesterday.'

A very doubtful sort of comfort, Lily thought; but she knew what Mrs Harper meant.

'Mamma,' said Mary, 'you might get a little sleep now baby's quiet, and I'll take Bertie downstairs.'

So she was persuaded to lie down and rest, Lily having first bathed her forehead with some Eau de Cologne which she happened to have in her pocket.

'Oh, thank you, that's delicious!' she said, when Lily poured it along the parting of her hair, as she had learned to do for Winnie. There were few luxuries for illness in that household, and plenty of aggravations.

In the room below they found Mr Harper, just come in from a committee, and off on a round of visiting. It was one of the first warm days of spring, and he looked utterly jaded.

'Have some tea, papa,' said Mary,—'do, you'll work better after it. I'll have it ready in ten minutes.'

The one maid, beside their little nurse, could not be spared from her work ; so Mary, still carrying Bertie, went off into the kitchen. *Her* eldest-daughtership was evidently no sinecure. Lily, who had promised to stay, looked on with a mixture of wonder and self-reproach. Her own easy indulgent life, stood in curious contrast to this, of constant toil and strain.

While Mary was out of the room, Lily, seizing the rare opportunity of a tête-a-tête with Mr Harper, summoned courage to ask him if she might have a class in the Sabbath school.

‘By all means, Miss Hope. There are three vacant at present, you can choose which you like best.’ And then he explained the machinery of the school, the series of lessons, times for teachers’ meetings, etc., till Lily grew bewildered.

‘But,’ she gasped out at length, more nervous than usual, between her dread of Mary’s return, and her longing for something more than machinery, ‘I’m not sure that I’m fit to teach at all. I know so little.’

‘Well, you had better begin with a junior class till you gain experience. It will soon come. By the time you have been a few weeks in the work, you will find it much easier.’

It was not that kind of experience she meant. She must try again. ‘I could not attempt it till lately—’

‘You could not leave your sister?’

‘No ; mamma stays with her now. But I mean—it

was not *that* which hindered me. I should not have cared for it, till a few months since.'

But Mr Harper would not, or could not, understand the timid asking for counsel thus implied; the yearning that he, her pastor, should speak to her one word of welcome and stimulus for the new untried path in which her feet were yet so uncertain. She valued his teaching from the pulpit, and was helped by it; but one sentence for herself would have given even to that a new meaning. And besides, did Mr Harper, after all those exhortations, really care so little for the individuals who listened to them? Was it nothing to him, that one living soul had indeed sought that kingdom of heaven to which he invited all with such impassioned entreaty? Which did he really feel, the earnestness or the carelessness?

Lily pondered this question, not greatly to her own benefit, on her way home; while he, good man, remained utterly unconscious of the harm he had done. For he *was* a good man, and in his way most useful. But two things about his congregation puzzled him sorely—two problems he was always trying to solve, and always left unexplained to his own satisfaction. He hammered at them, mentally, this very afternoon, as he walked off in one direction from his door, while Lily turned homewards in another, wondering over *her* difficulty. (If he had only known it, the one might have cleared up the other.) Why was it that so few of the religiously in-

clined poor responded to his importunate entreaties that they would come to Church? Why were the free-seats at St Catherine's nearly empty—most comfortable ones they were, and well placed for hearing—while every available corner of Ebenezer Chapel, down in a dingy back lane, was crammed, till no amount of peppermint, and no sprigs of 'southern-wood,' bought in the market on Saturday night, could enable the delicate sempstress from the attic opposite to endure it without headache? It was not that Mr Harper did not, in the phraseology of Ebenezer Chapel, 'preach the truth;' for one of its people, who had ventured to hear him, expressed no doubt on that point; but still the poor thronged its greasy-looking benches, and joined the loud Hallelujah chorus of its hymns, and *would not* come up the hill to hear the organ, and be more comfortably accommodated. 'It was so homely,' they said, and, though the preacher did not know much grammar, and told his mind freely about the 'corruption of the 'uman 'eart,' he knew pretty well whereabouts each of his hearers stood, in relation to the great realities of which he spoke to them, and his discourses had a home-going force, the lack of which, earnest though they were, made Mr Harper's too often like arrows thrown at a venture. And if the pale-faced sempstress met him, as she lingered near the door when service was over, she got a word for her individual self, which sent her back to her attic a happier and braver woman for the rest of the week. Nevertheless Mr

Harper wondered sorely about the Ebenezer congregation. He was too charitable, too ready to rejoice in any true teaching, to be angry over them, but perplexed he certainly was.

Then, on the other hand, why, of the wealthier part of his people, did so many wander off to the new church of St Aldegonde? Why did he see one empty place after another, in what used to be family pews, and why did he hear always the same reply upon inquiry? 'Oh yes, they had given up attending St Catherine's and—he knew how to supply the rest. It was very sad, very puzzling. Some undoubtedly were drawn by their taste in colours, and some by their ear for music, and some would follow any fashion, however absurd. But Mr Harper could not, in common honesty, deny that there were many who went for none of these reasons. He could only groan over them, 'silly girls, silly girls!' Silly they might be, some of them—not all. So much the worse, alas, if they drifted away, no one knew whither. 'Yes, it was sad,' he knew, 'but it was one of the signs of the times. Romanism would no doubt increase, and this was a development of it.' But it did not occur to him that some of the stray lambs might be kept within the fold by a kindly word from one appointed to watch it; not of warning only—they had no lack of that—but of individual sympathy. Many, in sheer misery of mental unrest, were blindly craving for something to still it. Better if he had shewn *them* the 'more

excellent way,' then mourned to others that they had chosen the wrong.

But Mr Harper would have argued in excuse, that he could not know all his people, like the minister of Ebenezer Chapel; and would not invite them to the confessional, like the Rev. Cecil—at St Aldegonde's. Yet, because one might be impossible, and the other wrong, did it therefore follow that no middle way of right lay between them? Lily Hope might have suggested one, if he had asked her.

She herself ran up the hall steps on her return, with her heart and feet lighter than she had come down them. An 'object' had sprung up before her,—if only she might be allowed to realise it; and already the hope alone had given colour and spring to what had before seemed only flat. But before she could speak of it, even to Winnie, she must have a quiet half-hour alone. She stole upstairs softly,—glad to hear voices in the drawing-room, and feeling sure she would not be wanted there. And once in her room, she locked the door, and sat down to think.

But with the thinking came, first of all, self-reproach. She looked at herself as she had been at luncheon time,—perverse, and altogether disagreeable;—how different from her own ideal, different even from Mary Harper. And through all these last months, the same unpleasing picture presented itself. She studied it till she could not bear the sight.

Yet, after awhile, from her very shame and despair, there rose a 'better hope.' What she could not make of herself, Another might make her. Was not the kingdom of her heart His; and was not His power 'exceeding great' to reign and rule? If she yielded herself to Him, as in the helplessness of very death, would not His 'more abundant' life so fill and penetrate her, that henceforth not *she* might live, but *Christ*. And so, henceforth, He only might be seen and heard, might work and suffer, in and through her; all unloveliness of self so covered over with the 'beauty of the Lord her God,' that clothed in this, she might 'walk worthy of the vocation wherewith she was called.' Was not this,—the thought came to her like a revelation,—the meaning of His own deep word, 'Abide in Me, and *I in you?*'

Some doubts rose as she pondered. Might she not be wrong? If there were only any to ask,—any who would teach her 'the way of God more perfectly!' But Mrs Hope was now one of the inner circle,—so near that she had gone further off, and Mr Harper, it was evident, would give her no help. And there seemed no one else.

No one? A voice reproved her; the same which had once spoken to the blind, those words of strength,— 'What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?' Was not his answer hers? Must it not be always the same,— 'Lord, that I might receive my sight!' For she too, longed for light. Something was before her which she knew not;—a truth, half grasped, which should make

her whole life glorious with power and joy. She saw it only in part ;—how should she attain the clearer sight she longed for ? Surely as this blind man,—as she herself, when she first came in her helplessness to find Christ as a Saviour. There must be a cry like his, a cry only more intense, because many even of His followers could not understand it, and would bid her hold her peace. But, waiting on Him, following Him fully, so far as the light He had given showed, so the answer would come to her prayer. So she would learn the meaning of that deepest truth,—that deepest reality on this side heaven,—*Christ in us*. She did not know it yet. It was, as she had said months before, like music half heard which she could not set her life to. But she felt assured now, that the music was there, and that was something,—was indeed much.

No one could tell why the family atmosphere seemed that evening to have grown suddenly clear. Mrs Hope felt as if at last she could breathe in it,—as if a thunder cloud had dispersed, and left the air full of sweet freshness. We know so little what is passing in lives around us, or how mysteriously our own are touched by influences we never hear of.

Dr Hope was absorbed and anxious that evening. He had a 'bad case' on hand, and Lily knew the signs, and felt she must be silent. But at breakfast-time the next morning she gave the history of her afternoon. 'Poor Mrs Harper,' sighed the doctor, compassionately ;

‘Ruskin speaks of a heaven for over-worked cab-horses, —I fancy there will be some sort of martyr-crowns by-and-by for over-worked mothers. Her life’s a heavier load than she has strength for, —I wish one could lighten it.’

‘I was thinking I might lighten Mary’s, papa ; if you have no objection, I might teach Milly and Lucy a little every day,—she has no time to give them proper lessons, and Lucy is so eager to learn.’

Her father bent on her one of his keen grave looks. ‘Have you counted the cost ? If you begin you must go on,—no shirking because you don’t find work play.’

‘I think I have,’ said Lily, quietly ; and after another moment’s study of her face, the doctor thought so too.

‘I have no objection, if mamma hasn’t. Perhaps you’ll be doing as much good as if you turned district visitor.’

So the lessons were begun forthwith. They were not quite holiday work, either to the teacher or pupils. But, to the former at least, they were a well-spring of mental health.





CHAPTER VIII.

COUSIN CLAUDE.

THE scene of my story changes to the Gloucestershire village, where it opened,—a quiet, quaint little place;—a bit of old England, left in a nook of safe obscurity, away from the rush of railways and the hurrying steps of progress. Indeed, it seems to be apart from everything but fields and sky, each circling it with loving arms, in which it nestles with full content.

A pleasant village too it was, this Alveston,—or rather is,—for I see no reason why I should write of it in the past tense. One long straggling street is crossed at right angles by another, also long and straggling; and in the open space where they meet, a stone bridge spans the river Tint, so that the sweet babble of water mingles with the clink of the blacksmith's anvil, and the merry music of children's voices. An old-fashioned farm-house,

belonging to Dr Hope, and in which he had fitted up some rooms as a summer home for his family, stands near the centre of the village. A row of elms extends down the line of houses opposite to this ; cottages, most of them, with fuschias and geraniums making a glow of brightness through their small square windows ; and gardens in front, full of sweet-williams and pinks, roses and stocks,—dear old English flowers with a breath of the past lingering in their scent.

In the principal sitting-room of 'the Hollies,'—so it was called, from two quaintly clipped trees which stood by the gate,—we find, this fair May morning, Mrs Hope, Lilius, and Winnie. Winnie's sofa was drawn near the window, whence she could see what passed in the village street ;—fathers and mothers going to their work, or returning from it ; children trooping to school ; old men and women sitting at their cottage doors, dreaming, or perhaps grumbling in the sunshine. And then there is the carrier's cart, as it starts to or returns from the neighbouring town, each time making a stir in the village quiet ; or the squire's carriage, a rare sight this ;—or the old post-man, on his shambling grey pony, which seemed to know by instinct where to stop, and was greatly discomposed by being pulled up opposite a house which he thought had no right to letters. He always turned to the gate of the Hollies, however, where Lily was generally waiting for him. She received a whole budget this morning, and ran quickly back with them to the house,

for post-time was an event here, and plans for the day were never settled till it came, for sometimes Dr Hope ran down for a few hours, and Arlingford friends beside might be 'generally expected.'

'Your cousin Claude is coming,' said Mrs Hope, looking up from the letter, which, as Liliast handed it to her, had touched a little sore spot in her own heart,—she seldom heard from her father now;—'coming for a long visit, probably to stay the summer.'

Claude Rayner was a orphan niece of Dr Hope, but it so happened that neither of his daughters had seen her. Her mother died when she was an infant; and during her father's life-time he had, for the most part, kept her with him abroad, where, since his death, she had remained under the care of another guardian. But this gentleman coming to England, she had written to her uncle Hope begging to be allowed to visit him for awhile. She was the child of a favourite sister, and he had given her a willing assent.

'Oh, I'm glad,' said Winnie; while Liliast, in the same breath, exclaimed,—'What a pity! I mean,' she added in explanation, 'I don't feel as if I wanted anybody that doesn't belong to us, and I don't think Claude will. She'll frighten *me*, I know, with her fashion and brilliance.'

'Nonsense,' said Winnie; 'though I do believe you and she will live in worlds so far apart that you can't see from one into the other. And I'm not so near her world now as I was once. I wonder if it would be pos-

sible to bring her into ours! *You* may, she added, glancing at Mrs Hope; 'but I'm afraid she would think I had only left my old world because it left me. Besides, I never could set myself to "talk good" to people,—I remember how I hated it myself.'

'And if you did "set" yourself, Winnie;' said Mrs Hope smiling; 'the *doing* good would be doubtful enough. But if love is true, don't you think it must utter itself? The name most treasured in our hearts, must be on our lips too.'

'No,' said Winnie; 'that's just what I don't think, and never shall. But I know the speaking is right; only—it isn't easy.'

'When is Claude coming, mamma?' asked Lily.

'On Monday.' Mrs Hope read the letter aloud, and then she and Liliás set off for their morning walk. But lingering first by Winnie's sofa, she whispered,—'You were wishing for some work the other day, dear; perhaps it is sent. But it's sometimes easier to wish for work than to like it when it comes,—or even to recognise it.'

Winnie shook her head. 'It's hard enough to keep *oneself* right, without thinking of other people;—all the thoughts come buzzing about, like bees,—only they don't bring honey, they only sting.'

'Do you remember that story of St Anthony, the Egyptian Hermit?'

'No,—hermits are not much in my line.'

'But this is. Anthony, as he sat in the desert, was

weary in heart, and said,—“Lord, I long to be saved, but my wandering thoughts will not let me. Show me what I shall do?” And looking up, he saw one like himself, twisting ropes, and rising up to pray. And a voice bade him work too, whether at twisting ropes, or in some other fashion.’

‘I see,’ said Winnie; ‘I must look for ropes to twist. ‘And the thoughts’—

‘And the thoughts;—well, when they come, don’t begin a hand-to-hand fight. Turn your mind to something else,—some work.’

‘Yes,’ interrupted Winnie; ‘if I could find any,—but there isn’t much I can do.’

‘You needn’t look for *much*. If we do the little we can find, then, when we are ready for something greater, God will send it, and send us light to see it too.’

‘Turn your mind to something else?’ Did Mrs Hope quite know how difficult her counsel was to follow? It was easy for her and Lilies, out in the May freshness, under hawthorns so white, that they looked like drifts of moonlight on summer leaves—to draw the beauty of spring-time into their very lives, and be gladdened,—they knew not why. But for Winnie, as she lay day after day struggling with pain and nervous discomfort, it was a different matter. Especially here, where so many bright days had been spent, when heart and step were alike free—so near the old haunts she could never hope to see again, and almost within sound of that soft speech

of nature, which could so seldom soothe her now,—it was hard for her to turn her thoughts anywhere but to the fair past, which made the present seem cheerless. She had learned indeed, through that sweet teaching which God often gives in sorrow, to give thanks even for that past,—for the clouds which darkened it had shown her the beauty of sunshine which they could not hide. But the lesson was hardly familiar yet, and its sweetness was sometimes over-mastered by its pain.

So Winnie drooped miserably during those first days at Alveston. Mrs Hope and Liliás were much out of doors,—which the former insisted on for Liliás, after her long confinement,—and she had a theory too, that quiet was good for Winnie, and that every healthy mind ought to enjoy solitude. Perfectly true,—only the healthy body has something to say in the matter, and Winnie was hardly strong enough yet to live upon herself,—for there were many hours when reading and work were alike impossible. Liliás guessed somewhat of this, and stayed with her whenever she could; but Mrs Hope, whose varied experiences had taught her curiously little of sickness, could not be made to comprehend it. She and Winnie, moreover, had never yet quite taken to one another. Winnie thought her a ‘paragon of excellence,’ only—‘she would like her much better when she had found out an imperfection or two.’ Oh, Lily,’ she sighed; ‘if she would just give in to a little wholesome excitement now and then,—if she only wasn’t so quiet, so pro-

vokingly still and calm, I could feel nearer to her! If she would even get angry with me, when I vex her, instead of being always good. It's her everlasting patience that exasperates me.'

Mrs Hope, on the other hand, thought Winnie shallow. She could sympathize with Lily's reserve, and Nellie Grahame's wayward doubts, but Winnie's playfulness was beyond her. It was not *in her* to understand. She was half shocked, and wholly puzzled;—and Winnie took a mischievous delight in shocking and puzzling still more. It was very naughty of her, she knew, but she resigned herself to thinking that naughtiness must have its way.

But, on this particular morning, it took another form. She kept her smile till Mrs Hope and Lily were out of sight, and then came a burst of tears, the more violent for repression.

'If I could only go too!'—the yearning was too strong to be combated—'if I could walk even into the garden! Oh, it is so wrong to wish things different,' and the very shame of having wished, brought another outburst, till at last she sobbed herself quiet, and lay back exhausted.

'I haven't learned,' she murmured, '“in whatsoever state that I am, therewith to be content.”'

But in the very repeating of the words there came another thought,—

'St Paul had to *learn*;—then if it didn't come all at once to him, I can't wonder if it does not to me. And

there was the "learning obedience," even from our dear Lord himself. Then He will have patience,—if He only sees I am ready for the learning !'

It was easier to be still after that. The tears had brought their own healing.

But of course they brought exhaustion too, and inevitable headache. The day must be given up to endurance,—but as its slow hours dragged onwards, one remembrance set itself to sweet music in her heart,—The "things which he suffered !"—them *He knows*.

The three were sitting in the twilight that same evening, when Lily, looking up the village street, announced that a carriage was in sight.

'It can't be anyone coming here. But it is though ! Why, who can it be at this hour ?—and there's luggage too.'

They watched a young lady alight, and walk quickly up the gravel ; a pretty graceful figure enough, with a certain air of style about it. And, in a moment more, the maid ushered her in, muttering a name which nobody heard.

She stood a second uncertain, then advanced towards the sofa.

'You are Winnie, I know ; I'm not sure about anybody else,—and I suppose I'm not expected,' she added, breaking into a silvery laugh ; 'but I'm cousin Claude, if you ever heard of me. I wasn't to have come till Monday, but I'm here to-night.'

Mrs Hope hastened to welcome her. With Lillas and Winnie she took the initiative, and kissed them forthwith.

'We found an escort for to-day, and he—it—couldn't wait for me, so I was obliged to pack up and be off. Will you have me?'

'You will have some tea,' said Mrs Hope, smiling; 'and will you go up to Lily's room till your own is ready?'

She turned round to Lily, with a little half-commanding gesture, as if to bid her lead on, and she would follow.

'Don't go away,' she said, when her cousin, after offering to help her, was turning to leave the room; 'unless you want to go down and "sit in committee" upon me. I'll excuse you if you do.'

Again that silvery laugh! The contagion was irresistible. Lily laughed too.

'That's right. I'm so glad—I never get on with people that can't laugh. Sit down, while I do my hair.'

So saying, she took off her hat, and shook down a profusion of silky ringlets,—black as were her eyebrows,—while the eyes beneath them were lustrous brown.

'You're not glad to see me,' she said, while her fingers flashed in and out among the curls. 'I shouldn't like having anybody pitch-forked upon me, as I have been upon you. Hush,' she added, seeing Lily about

to speak, 'don't say anything polite, please, because I know the truth. Well, I'm sorry ; but good people—and I know you're all good—should have something to try them now and then. Can't you look upon me as an affliction, that may turn out all for the best ?'

Her listener could not reply. Winnie would have been up to the war of words, but this light skirmishing was too much for Lily. Before she could bring up her forces, the enemy was off. However, Claude chattered on, throwing her things about in a fashion which, before she had been in it five minutes, brought Lily's neat room into hopeless disorder,—and at last announced herself ready.

In the drawing-room they were confronted by another arrival—Charlie Grahame.

'You're surprised to see me, Miss Hope,' he said, answering Lily's look of astonishment, and not ill-pleased by the blush which went with it. 'Nellie told you I was coming to settle at Carnford ?'

'Yes, but I had forgotten,' said Lily. Her colour deepened ; Charlie did not feel flattered this time. He had pictured her watching for his arrival, and now to find she had forgotten he was near !

Charlie Grahame had kept his word to his sister in a way which filled her life with new joy. All his old indolence seemed shamed away. He worked steadily, and broke off many hurtful companionships. The sight of that one sovereign had acted like a charm. And

within the last month he had come to Carnford as assistant to a leading physician there—entering thus upon a path which gave every promise of leading to affluence and success. So Charlie's prospects were good, and his hopes of Lily had brightened with them. He could not pronounce himself 'desperately in love,' but still he meant now to 'look after her' in earnest, and he saw no reason why she should not look at him. But it was not reassuring to find that the fact of his presence in the neighbourhood had entirely passed from her memory.

Before tea was over, it seemed to every one as if Claude had been there always. She slipped into her place quite naturally, fitting herself in some subtle fashion to each one of the group—winning Mrs Hope by a certain sweet deference ;—and Winnie, by the fun which beguiled her pain ; while Lily, a little doubtful, and not given to sudden likings, was yet fascinated, she knew not why ;—all the more so, that Charlie, dazzled by the brilliant stranger, left her much in peace. Charlie, in fact, was a little piqued, and disposed to show Miss Hope that she need not be *too* sure of his allegiance.

He looked at her after tea, however, and begged for music. 'I get none now ; there isn't much melody in a bachelor's life.'

'Then I suppose there are no discords,' said Claude. I think I would like to live by myself, and grow into a

monotone. Cousin Lily,—there are some flowers here ; may I arrange them ?’

‘Oh yes,’ said Lily ;—‘I brought them in just before you came.’

Lily turned to the piano, and began to play—very soon in entire forgetfulness of everything but her music—her features changing with every change, as its beauty ‘passed into her face.’ It was generally Charlie Grahame’s custom to place himself so that he could watch her ; but that evening his ‘turning over’ was done with wandering eyes.

‘What did I begin these for, I wonder ! I never *can* arrange flowers,’ said Claude, impatiently pushing them away from her, when the music ceased. ‘My bouquets are always a medley—dumpy here, lanky there—a compound of all colours that do *not* blend. Heigh-ho ! I suppose I’m much of a medley myself, and therefore any expression of this *me* must be in some measure medley too.’

‘Medleys may be reduced to order,’ said Charlie, sauntering up to her.

‘Yes,’ said Claude, dreamily ; ‘and I daresay I *could* give an expression of myself which should not be medley at all—“sorted,” as the Scotch say, under separate heads—clear as any sermon, and as dry.’

‘It would have one slight disadvantage.’

‘What ?’ said Claude, lifting her brown eyes innocently to his.

‘It would not be true.’

‘Which wouldn’t be true—the clearness or the dryness?’

The silver laugh rang out again, so infectious, that Charlie was saved the trouble of answering. ‘Will you try another form of expression?’ he said, looking at the piano.

‘No more satisfactory than the other,’ replied Claude; but she began to play nevertheless, her fingers dashing through a brilliant fantasia, with which her mind seemed to have nothing to do. And Charlie kept them mostly to the same employment till he took his leave.

The next day, Sunday, was one of May’s fairest; sunshine, bright broad sunshine, folding itself over the earth like a garment of light; and blue sky—the blue into which you may gaze far beyond the white clouds which float in it—gaze, till thought and sight lose themselves in the depths, and yet come back rested, not wearied, by their flight. Mrs Hope, Claude, and Lilies, went to Church together—Claude delighted with the novelty of everything, but not, Lily thought, caring much for the sweet rest, which, to her, was such a joy. And her merriment jarred upon it. Lily wished again she had not come.

‘Your service is very *triste*,’ said Claude, when they came out again. ‘The sunshine does me more good.’

‘I wonder,’ said Mrs Hope, ‘why sunshine should be

thought out of place in God's house, when we welcome it in our own? I know there is a charm to some minds in dimness and gloom, but I think it's apt to bring an idea that religion is not good for common daylight, with its work and joy, but must be kept for sorrow only, and the hush which sorrow brings.'

Claude was silent a minute. The thought seemed new to her, but she was in no mood to dwell on it.

'And the singing! That droning harmonium, and the choir following or going before, as the fancy took them! I should think those school-children are glad to have something they may lawfully do in Church, for they certainly did it with their might. It would have been nicer to sit quiet and listen to the bird-music outside. It was more in tune.'

'Suppose we don't discuss the service any more,' said Mrs Hope, 'I do not think it helps one's reverence.'

But just as she said this they were overtaken by the Hall party,—Mr Ware and his two sisters, and all stopped to exchange greetings. Lily was just about to introduce her cousin to Miss Ware, when a sudden sight of Claude's face made her stop, and start. It was white—white to the very lips; but she recovered herself in a moment, and answered Mr Ware's grave greeting with one equally composed. Apparently they had met before.

'Yes, we knew him abroad,' she replied, when Mrs Hope remarked this as they went into the house,—'but I didn't know he was here.'

And Lily, catching a glimpse of her face again as she passed her on the stairs, saw that it was whiter than ever.

But when she appeared at dinner she seemed quite herself again.

‘Who was that fair girl,’ she asked, ‘who looked so lonely by herself in a big pew, near the pulpit?’

‘That!—that was Mrs Thornton, our vicar’s bride,’ said Lily; ‘but she looks only a girl, to be sure. Mamma, we ought to call there.’

‘Oh, do tell me what she is like,’ said Winnie; ‘fancy his marrying a *girl*—and he’s in the middle ages.’

‘She doesn’t look fit to have the care of herself, much less of any one else. I should think she never had, before.’

And yet it was for that ‘girl’s’ sake that Mr Thornton had given up his Fellowship, and accepted, after some patient living on hope, the more substantial living of Alveston, which was in the gift of his College. In the shade of this same College he had lived till about two years before, occupied in an elaborate confutation of some German heresy, which catches now and then a straggler from orthodoxy in its meshes, though these seem for the most part singularly unattractive. Indeed, few of the general public were even aware of their existence, until Mr Thornton’s book of warning impelled them to take up the brown dry things and examine for themselves. But, by this time they had lost much of their interest for the author, who had become entangled in meshes of a different nature.

It seemed, indeed, as if the love which had been so late to bloom, had made amends for delay, by the fiery passionate glow, which bore it at once from bud to blossom. How Alice Leslie ever kindled it, may remain among the mysteries which are nowise explained, as many think, by being stated. Mr Thornton met her during a College vacation, while visiting some friends in the north, and gave her, at forty-five, the half-unreasoning worship which is possible to few after twenty. He had a fresh unworldly heart, this College Fellow, though some doubted whether or not he had one at all, for it was by no means 'worn upon his sleeve,' but rather hidden under a good many folds. Alice Leslie, with her woman's instinct, penetrated the folds, and, with her woman's faith, trusted what she found beneath.

Human beings, however, are not all heart; and, for those who are to live together, it is desirable that there should be some contact of mind with mind; or the life of one, at least, must be such entire self-suppression as will in time wear out the finer springs of it. And as contact is only possible under certain conditions of affinity, it may be sighed for, when these are wanting, as hopelessly as the lost Pleiad. But Alice Leslie and Edward Thornton had no thought of their absence or presence—the one overlooking them in the eager love which left thought behind—the other being simply unconscious of their need.



CHAPTER IX.

THREADS OF TALK.

I DON'T understand her—I'm not sure that I like her. At least, if I like her one hour, I don't the next, and I'm sure she has seemed different every day of the fortnight she's been here. I only know we never should get on together.'

Lily spoke with a vehemence unusual to her. She and Winnie were out in a sheltered nook of the Hollies' garden—the latter on her couch as usual, delighting in sunshine and sweet air—in the whirl of winged things around, and the leafy shade above, shot through with gleams of blue.

'I think you are hard to please, Lilius—I never saw a creature that seemed to captivate everyone as she does.'

'Everyone! yes, that's just it,' said Lily, discontentedly. The versatility which she could not understand almost vexed her.

‘Mamma for instance—I could hardly help smiling when they went off together just now—they seemed so perfectly content with one another.’

‘Yes,’ said Lillas, still with discontent in her tone. Winnie caught it.

‘I don’t believe you think Mrs Hope is quite so good as Mrs Leigh.’

‘Oh, hush, Winnie! I wish you wouldn’t say such things.’

‘Why not? You think them.’

‘I don’t always. It’s only that I’m puzzled.’

‘What about?’ It was Miss May’s cheery old voice which spoke. She was down at the Hollies for a visit, —and, like the rest of the party, seemed to have come under the fascination of Claude’s spell.

‘What puzzles you, Lillas?’ said the old lady, settling herself in a garden-seat.

‘Different aspects of life,’ said Lily, laughing, ‘or rather the same life in different phases.’

Miss May glanced at her curiously. She thought she read her meaning, but she was too wise to show it.

‘Oh, that’s a puzzling subject, my dear, very. I never understand it myself—only sometimes little bits of light come out here and there, when one looks long enough.’

‘I was thinking, for instance,’ pursued Lily in explanation, ‘of a life entirely given to God—spent in His service, all self-denial and devotion—becoming much like other lives, turning aside, as it were, from its own

ideal,—I don't know how to express it—only it is very disappointing.'

'Just one side of old Richard Baxter's lesson—he said it took him some time to learn, and I daresay he was perplexed enough about it—that the "good are not so all good, or the evil so all evil as he thought." But, my dear, I think we know very little about it, and we make sad mistakes in saying that one sort of life is spent in God's service, and another not. It all depends on what service is—and it may be that the *less* to us, may mean *more* to Him. I could fancy, just, you know, as a general instance, that there might be more self-will and self-choosing in a life given to what people call work for God, than in one lived in a busy home, taken up with things that must be done, and yet don't any of them seem worth doing. Don't you believe that the longings and prayers, which can find no possible outlet, will be shown, bye-and-bye, to have been true service—aye, and perhaps far truer, than what *we* call such,—because of the submission which accepts God's will that they should not be realised?'

'That's nice to think of,' said Winnie.

'Oh, but,' said Lily, who was very severe still in the intolerance which suffering had not softened, 'that may be true, when God himself has put the hindrances; but what if we turn from the freer life He gave, and heap barriers about us with our own hands? I can't understand how anyone could do it.'

'Well, my dear, when you look back, as I do, from nearly threescore and ten years, you'll be content without understanding it. You'll see how many mistakes you have made yourself, and how many other people thought you would make, which you knew were not mistakes at all. And you'll love that word in the Bible more and more, "Judge nothing before the time." For there are many lives we cannot understand the meaning of here. They seem to have none—and if God disciplines them, it looks to us like wasted pain. But we shall find it all out bye-and-bye, when we see them used at last in His own way. But I'm going back into the house now,' she added, 'for I haven't finished my letters, and I didn't mean to stay more than a minute. Hark—isn't that Claude's laugh?'

'Yes,' said Lily, 'the lane passes behind this hedge. I wonder to whom she is talking? Not mamma, for she meant to call at the vicarage, and Claude was to come home by herself.'

Lily tried to peep through the leaves, but they were too thick.

'Why, it's Charlie Grahame's voice,' said Winnie, as Miss May turned into the house; 'all his patients must be out here, I think,—he haunts these lanes.'

'Then he's like a ghost that only appears to one person,' said Lily, laughing; for this is the third time Claude has met him. Well, I don't care, so long as he doesn't haunt *me*.'

'I say, Lily, I can't help thinking of what you told me about Claude and Mr Ware; there's some mystery in it. He has never been here since that Sunday, and I used to think he liked to come. I wonder if we shall see him to-morrow night!'

Lily was seized with a sudden interest in her work. She stitched away very diligently.

'Lily,' pursued Winnie; 'did you hear what he did the other day?'

'What? Who?'

'You know well enough;—don't be tiresome. He called to see that poor man who is dying at the other end of the village, and stayed several hours, reading and praying with him,—just a word now and then, as he was able to listen. His wife told mamma next morning.'

'Indeed,' said Lily. But her eyes were sparkling under their drooping lids.

'*Will* he come? No, I don't think he will!' So thought Claude Raynor, as she dressed the following evening. 'I don't much care;—yes I do though,' and for a moment the small hands were clenched, and a spasm of pain passed over the mobile face. 'Where are those lines, I wish they wouldn't keep ringing in my ears,—

Oh dumb, dumb lips! Oh crush'd, crush'd heart!

Oh grief past pride,—past shame!

"My own fault"—well, *that* doesn't help me much. But it wasn't. It was he who was jealous and unreason-

able, and then too proud to hear me speak. Nay, I would not speak, I would not plead ; how could I ?—They say he has grown quite good since those days. That wouldn't have suited me, anyhow!—He shan't think I'm caring. He shall see I can play the old game still. If I had only kept from it that one time ! It doesn't matter now, nothing ever will matter again ! Oh Arthur !'

Take a peep into another room of the old rambling house. There is Lily, sitting for a moment by her little white bed, her hands lying lightly in happy rest, as hands never lie again when once the heart's deepest fountains have been stirred. Why does she start up suddenly, and brush out that brown hair with such elaborate care, while a half unconscious smile flits now and then over her face ? I cannot tell you why,—but I may guess, and so can you.

The two girls met at the drawing-room door, and entered it together. They were a contrast. Both wore muslins,—for the 'party' was of the simplest description, as suited the season and the place. Lily's was white—with green ribbons, cool and fresh. She looked as pure as one of June's own roses. Claude's had a pinky shade, suiting her dark hair and gipsy face. She showed her best to-night. Where did that glow come from ?

'Well, young ladies,' said Miss May, as they stood before her ; 'you're bonnie to look at, both of you.'

Compliments are safe enough from an old woman like me. And those dresses are pretty. Did you ever consider, by the way, how many people, in taking mental stock of them, one measures by the clothes ?'

'Yes,' said Winnie, from her corner ; 'I know one girl at school, who is only to me a cold white hand, a sort of shadowy smile, and long statuesque folds of violet serge. And heaps of other people one meets are all lace and silk, and bonnet-flowers together. But there are the Thorntons.'

Very girlish appeared the young bride, as she entered with her grave-looking husband ; her hair rippling in bright waves to her waist, and her eyes, soft and blue, looking through their long lashes with a sort of wistful appeal for caressing, which made Miss May whisper to Winnie, that she longed to take her in her arms and give her a good kiss. Mr Thornton, by the way he looked at her, apparently felt much the same impulse.

Others gathered in after this first arrival, of whom Charlie Grahame was one. He made his way straight to Claude's side, but her greeting was somewhat *distract*. She certainly seemed to be not 'all there.' It was only for a minute or two, however. She turned round very soon to show him a new photograph in Lily's album, bending half shyly towards him as she did so. But it was very odd, Charlie thought, that, as her hand held the book, he could have fancied it trembled. He glanced from it to her face.

‘You are ill, I’m afraid ;—let me—’

‘I’m perfectly well,’ said Claude, rising at the same moment, to bestow a singularly haughty bow on Mr Ware, who, with his sisters, had just entered. There was a sort of grave pity in his look, as he returned it, which made Claude stamp her foot under the table. But she went on with her photograph criticism, talking with a random brilliance which fairly bewildered Charlie.

Mr Ware himself passed on to the further end of the room, where his sisters, with the vicar and Mrs Hope, were discussing some question about the village school.

‘Country children are difficult to teach,’ said Miss Ware; ‘they won’t answer questions, much less ask them, as town children will.’

‘You’re welcome to that, Gracie,’ said her brother; ‘I haven’t got my answers ready. Many and many a time, at the C—— Lane Ragged School, I have been tempted to fall back on the formula of my childhood. “Little boys must not be curious.” Only it would have been no use.’

‘Ah,’ said Mrs Hope ;—‘but I believe we often think children’s questions idle, just because we are too indolent to bestow any thought upon them,—because our own minds have grown so careless and torpid, that we have lost the power of observation. We have grown out of the wonder stage, not so much because of knowledge gained, as of interest and freshness lost.’

‘There’s one point of view,’ said the vicar (it seemed

odd that he should have any view in the matter at all), 'in which imagination should be more cultivated in children.'

'Exactly,' broke in Miss May; 'by reading fairy-tales. How I long for children now-a-days to read the dear old books of my childhood, rather than the endless stories of model boys and girls, who, if they are ever naughty at all, are so very *appropriately* naughty, just to illustrate some moral point. Little self-conscious monkeys, boys and girls are now, and as artificial, as if they were made up of bits out of books.'

'Well, I did not mean that at all, as it happens,' said the vicar; 'though I agree with you more than half. What I did mean was, that I think a child's imagination should be so quickened, that, in all its after life, *words may be pictures of things*. Is it not just because they are not so that one finds it often such hopeless work to get people to take in an idea? You express it, perhaps in half a dozen different ways, and you think you have made it clear to them; but, lo and behold, when you try to make them give it you back, you find they have only seized a fragment of it, and twisted that up in such a queer way, that you hardly know it again. I have noticed this repeatedly, even with educated people. And so one finds that half the work in the world is spoiled by muddle-headedness. People don't know what they mean themselves, or what others mean.'

'But it's very difficult,' Lily ventured, in the little

silence which followed this last remark. 'I've always found it so, both in the school at Arlingford and here, though to be sure I have not been teaching long,—to get children to take in anything beyond what they know. I mean,' she added, in explanation, 'it's easy enough up to a certain point, but after that—'

'I know,' said Mr Ware; 'but may one not say of all teaching, that one must not try to show what there is not yet power to perceive? *You* can see a truth, full of life, full of harmony; the very truth that is wanted to bridge over a chasm between two other truths. But those you teach are not even conscious of the chasm, and don't know what to do with the bridge. They will want it bye-and-bye to walk upon, but, till then, it is only in their way. However, perhaps this is only true of a higher stage of intellectual development than one meets in Sunday schools.'

Just here Mrs Hope became suddenly conscious that one of her guests was spending a rather stupid evening. Indeed, little Mrs Thornton looked as if she thought the whole discussion a distraction from her tatting. And yet every now and then, a puzzled expression passed over her face,—much like what you may see in a kitten, when a ball it wants to catch bounds past again and again, too fast to be laid hold of. But soon she was chattering quite happily to her hostess,—for the right string had been touched by a question about her old home,—still home to the child-wife, rather than the

new. And this new one, moreover, was not without its cares.

'There are so many things to do, and to think of,' she murmured, and the tatting fell rather wearily in her lap.

'Household troubles? Ah yes, they are trying sometimes. Tell me about some of them,' added Mrs Hope, drawing her a little away from the rest, into the curtained recess of the window; 'perhaps I can help,—at any rate, I can sympathise.'

'I know nothing about it, and it's so hard to learn, and—and—I'm so frightened of cook. She's been with Mr Thornton ever since he came here, and she doesn't like me a bit.' Poor child, she looked very doleful. Life just then to her was entirely overshadowed by—her cook.

'What do you think she did the day after I came home?' she asked suddenly, brushing away a tear, which would fall. 'She came to me in the dining-room after breakfast to ask my orders for dinner.'—

'Very proper, I should think.'

'Yes,—only I didn't know what to order. I've never been accustomed to anything of that sort.'

'Then you ought to have been,' it was on Mrs Hope's lips to say, but she only listened.

'But I thought I saw a way out of the difficulty, so I said, "Well cook, I daresay you know Mr Thornton's taste better than I,—you've been with him so long. Is

there any dish he particularly cares for?" She didn't know, she said; she "thought he liked beef-steak!" "Oh, then we'll have some beef-steak,"—that seemed clear enough. "Yes, ma'am,—how much shall I get?" Don't laugh at me,' and the blue eyes looked very appealing. 'I'm ashamed to tell you what I said. Oh, if I had only known! If I had ever been taught! But I told her,' she added, while her cheeks flushed with shame, 'I thought I'd heard mamma speak of ordering eight or ten pounds of meat, so I said, "Oh, perhaps eight pounds or so."'

Mrs Hope tried to keep grave, but the vision of this pile of beef-steak was too much for her. Indeed, Mrs Thornton laughed too.

'I thought cook looked rather odd,' she went on, 'but she didn't say anything. It was cruel of her, she might have told me. And then, when dinner-time came,'—another tear fell at the remembrance. It was very humiliating, certainly,—but whose fault was it that she had grown up with no more knowledge of domestic economy than of political?

'Had you a long-engagement?' Mrs Hope asked.

'Oh no,—only two months. There wasn't time to learn anything then. Mamma said she would teach me house-keeping after I left school, but she's so clever herself there seemed no room for anyone else; and besides, she always said it was more trouble to show me how to do things than to do them. And now I know nothing.'

'But it is not too late.'

'Yes, but it is,' she spoke rather bitterly; 'cook despises me, I know she does, and when I appeal to Edward he gets worried, and—cross,' she was going to add, but she checked herself in time. Yet here, already, was the "little rift within the lover's lute," which would slowly widen and widen, till the music of life was marred.

Other music, meanwhile, had begun during this household chat. Claude took her usual share in it, with more than her usual brilliance.

'Do you know this, Miss Raynor?' said Charlie, taking up a song and placing it before her;—'Fairy Dreams?'

Claude started and coloured. Another hand, not so long before, had turned for her those very leaves. And the last time!—She hesitated a moment, but her evil genius prevailed.

'Heartless!' Arthur Ware muttered, as he heard her begin,—'and I thought she was softening!'

Winnie watched him while she sang, and thought she had never seen a nobler face, with truth and strength in every line, and tenderness not wanting,—the face of one who had suffered and would conquer. What could he ever have had to do with Claude?

'He shall have one warning,' thought Arthur Ware, as he watched Charlie's fascinated gaze at the singer. And going up to Claude's portfolio, he chose from it a song which he knew was there, and laid it in his sight.

It was Longfellow's—

I know a maiden fair to see,

Beware, Beware !

But the warning came too late.

That same night, or rather early the following morning, Charlie was riding leisurely through one of the lanes near Carnford. He had found, on his return from Alveston, a summons to a patient three or four miles away, and was going home from his visit between two and three o'clock. Of course he had never been in bed, but the summer night was so exquisitely fair, that he hardly cared to hurry. It was pleasant to ride slowly on, and think of Claude. Would she be his one day? Would that little fairy figure make a home bright for him, flitting about with her sweet, winsome grace? Once, to be sure, he had thoughts of Lily, but those were over. Who could look at the two together? Claude was the rich glowing purple, which makes the pure blue beside it seem cold. No, he would leave the Lily for some one else to gather.

How soon could he possibly go to Alveston again, he wondered! Not to-day, but perhaps to-morrow. He was not very far from it now, and he looked across the fields in the direction where it lay, already visible in the early dawn. Yes, there it was, and that was the Hollies nestling in its clump of elms. But what was that rising from them,—a faint curl of smoke. Rather early for fires to be lighted,—but Charlie considered that probably

the farmer's family would stir themselves betimes, and begin the work of the day before the day itself. But the smoke grew thicker and darker. He drew up his horse and watched, for a vague fear came over him that it rose from no hearth-fire. In a few minutes it was darker still, rising steadily into the opal sky. No doubt now. He put spurs to his horse, and rode,—not for his own life, but it might be for others. For before he had ridden a mile, a spire of red light flashed up, and mingled itself in the curling cloud.

A terrible sight met him as he turned a corner of the road, and dashed up the long Alveston street. The fire was evidently raging fiercely, the flames mounting higher and higher each moment.

‘What is it?’ he asked hoarsely, as he dismounted and mingled with the excited crowd.

‘Farmer Smith’s barn,’ was the answer, and Charlie breathed again.

‘Not the house?’

‘No,—leastways not yet. Come and lend a hand.’

‘Yes,—but the ladies,’—Charlie could lend neither hand nor ear yet. At last, after some difficulty, he found them standing on the lawn, except Winnie, who had been carried to the vicarage.

‘Yes, we are safe,’ said Mrs Hope, as he came up; ‘and I believe there is little danger for the house, the night is so still.’

Charlie scarcely heeded her;—he passed round to

Claude. She grasped his hand, and half clung to him, pale, and shivering with excitement and fright.

‘Safe! Thank God!’ Lily heard the low eager words. So did also some one else, who came up at that moment. It was Arthur Ware.

But there was no time for talking. The two gentlemen went off together to the scene of action, and the rest watched and waited. Claude, unnerved, and half-hysterical, held fast by Mrs Hope’s arm, hardly soothed by her softly whispered assurance that there was no danger.

‘No, I know,—but it looks awful. See!’ There was a crash of falling beams,—a momentary darkness,—and then more lurid, fiercer light. Claude hid her face and shuddered.

‘Don’t watch it, dear. Let me take you to the vicarage, you can do no good here. Come.’

But her gaze went back again, fascinated. ‘I can’t help watching it. Oh Mrs Hope, isn’t it terrible!’

Poor Claude! It was like a flash into her life, and from the darkness it showed, she shrank back, trembling. It seemed as if, for one moment, she were made to see herself.

‘I wish we could do something,’ said Lily to Miss May. ‘Women are of no use in the world.’

‘Bless you, child, they’re ready when their turn comes, though they have to stand still and wait for it. Perhaps some of these strong arms, that are so busy with the

buckets, will get bruised in their work, and they won't go to one another for the tender touch that's to soothe the aching.'

'We needn't be hindrances anyhow,' said Lily, in a vexed tone,' for with her self-control and practical helpfulness, she had a great disdain for all nervous, incapable women ; 'Claude's going to faint, I believe, and somebody's arms will have to leave the buckets and help her.'

But none were forthcoming, and Claude had to be laid on a garden-seat, while Mrs Hope pressed some leaves upon her forehead,—wet with the night-dew,—for water there was none to be had.

The villagers meanwhile were working bravely. The vicar and Mr Ware formed them into a line leading from the Lint, and themselves seemed to be everywhere,—toiling, directing, cheering. The fire had broken out in part of the square of buildings of which the dwelling-house formed one side, the other being farm-offices. It was in the line at right angles with the house, but there were stables between, so the danger to it was comparatively slight. A messenger had been despatched to Carnford for the engines, but sometime must elapse before they could arrive. However, as the fire was really not so serious as it looked, it seemed likely to be got under without them.

And so, in fact, it was. The rafters were sawn, and slates removed, between the building where it originated,

and those on each side, and thus, the communication being cut off, it was confined to a comparatively narrow space. Indeed, as it was fed principally by a quantity of straw, which had been carted into the barn the day before, it was not difficult, by pouring water upon this, to check the flames by destroying their source. In little more time than the scene has been described in writing, all real danger was over.

The vicar, as soon as he could possibly escape, had gone home, anxious for his wife, whom he had left in an agony of fear,—but Arthur Ware and Charlie would stay at least till the engines arrived, in case the smouldering mass should break out again into mischief. But their presence being no longer needed on the spot, they both turned back to the lawn, to beg the ladies to go in and dismiss all fear. Claude's unconscious figure was the first thing that met their sight.

Charlie started forward, and was by her side in an instant. The young doctor was master of the situation here at least. Was there any envy in Arthur Ware's eyes, as he watched him take her up, and carry her to the house;—her face, white and deathlike, pressed against his breast! He lingered in the dining-room, at any rate, till Charlie came down from Miss Raynor's room, and announced that she was better. But he did not add, that her first word, sighed out while still half-unconscious, had been what only he heard,—‘Oh Arthur!’

He meditated upon it himself, however, as he rode back to Carnford. But her look when first she knew that he was bending over her, was pleasanter to think of,—so Charlie concluded she had meant him all the while.





CHAPTER X.

COMPLICATIONS.

MANY days and weeks of suffering followed for Winnie after that night of the fire. The shock had been very great to a system always most delicately poised, and easily thrown off its balance. And the result was, increased nervous prostration, broken now and then by fits of nervous energy, which ended, of course, in reaction. She would lie for days in her darkened room, unable to bear sound or step, all the long slow hours given up to mere endurance. But now, if never before, Winnie learned to know her stepmother. Love and patience won their way at last. Many a time, in the night, she awoke from troubled sleep to find her watching by her side. Many a time, in the day, that low steady voice would quiet her when she could listen to no other.

Mrs Hope, too, was learning to know Winnie. She

watched the daily struggle after unselfishness and meekness, and learned, from better understanding of her suffering, to be more forbearing when the struggle ended in failure. Lily saw all this, and inwardly rejoiced, though now and then a pang came over her, that she was less necessary, even to Winnie, than she had been. Would it be always so? Must she always give more than she received? Ah Lily, and if so it must be, remember the lips that have said, 'It is more blessed!'

Dr Hope came over to Alveston as often as his practice allowed, and put Winnie, when he could not be with her, under charge of Dr Grahame's coadjutor, Dr Henderson. For some weeks they both feared she could not rally. But youth and most tender nursing bore her through. She regained, not certainly her old point of strength, but one from which it seemed within reach.

One evening, early in September, Mrs Hope and Winnie were together in the little sitting-room upstairs, which, since her increased illness, had been appropriated for the latter's use. Dr Hope, for it was during one of his brief visits, had taken Claude and Lillias for a day's excursion in the neighbourhood. He wished the former to see a ruined castle, which she had not visited, and on the day but one following, he was to take her back with him to Arlingford, to join her other guardian. So her visit was nearly ended, not greatly to her own regret,—for she was tired of the country, and had, besides, other reasons for wishing to leave it. But she would be

missed, especially by Winnie, whose suffering her playful ways had often beguiled.

Winnie had begged to be left alone on this day ; but Mrs Hope, who had altered her opinion on some points, would not hear of that, and had remained with her.

She let her charge have a good deal of solitude, however, thinking wisely that it was no true kindness never to leave her. In health you can lock your door if you wish to be alone, but it is one of the trials of illness not to be able to get rid of your fellow-creatures.

Returning after a brief absence, she found Winnie, as usual, gazing at the beauty outside. Generally she was able for some light needle-work, and whenever this was the case, her work-basket was by her side ; but it had not been out for many a day.

‘How I wish that lovely golden light would stay with me,’ she said, ‘and not fade into the haze which creeps over all brightness when it is out of sight. I want to keep it for some of the winter days that will come,—but it will have died out then, and left nothing but cold and greyness.’

‘Not quite, Winnie. You cannot tell how much those same winter days owe to the summer ones that are forgotten. I think our minds are so constituted, that nothing can be received by them singly and nakedly. They so fill up and retouch the bare present for us, that we live over and over again all that has been sweetest and best in our lives, often without consciousness.’

Winnie's eyes went back to the window, the shadow of 'living over again' upon them for a moment. But it passed.

'I so often feel,' she said, after a while, 'in this soft evening light, as if I were very near some secret I had never reached; as if,—I don't know how to say it,—but as if low hints were fluttering about me, leading on to glorious meanings. But just when I think I can grasp them, they fold themselves up, and float away. Do you know,' she added, smiling, 'I fancied awhile since, that I was going where I should understand it all.'

Mrs Hope crossed the room to kneel by her sofa. 'But you're getting better now. Nay, not tears, surely, Winnie!'

'They're very perverse,' said Winnie, but her smile was accompanied with quivering lips, 'they ought not to come—only, I'm such a coward, and life seems harder than being at rest with Christ. I'm afraid it's rather that I want to be at rest, than that I long to be with Him.'

She laid her head back wearily. We will not blame her till we know ourselves what it is to look on through years of possible pain. Perhaps He blamed her not, who remembers the 'days of His flesh.'

'Do you remember,' said Mrs Hope gently, 'that the dying with Christ must come before the living with Him? And that death can be only *now*, in the sacrifice of self, and the meek bearing of His cross. The crucifying of the flesh can have no place bye-and-bye. It is not easy,

but it is *the way*. "He himself went not up into glory, but first He suffered pain," even He only was thus made perfect.'

'Ah,' said Winnie, 'but it would be easier to be content with one's life, if it was worth anything to Him.'

'Dear child, we cannot tell what He counts worthy. Perhaps it may be what to us seems trifling, because it is small,—giving up our own will, or being content to do disagreeable bits of work, which other people shrink from,—being satisfied to be quite passed over, while others get the credit of what we have suggested, or being ready that God himself should seem to pass us by, even when our hearts are yearning for His work, ready to be apparently unneeded, if such is His will.'

'I like that,' said Winnie. 'Hush, isn't there a sound of wheels? They can't be home already!'

'No, it's Mrs Stretton. Dear me, it's easier to preach self-denial than to practise? I must go down ;—and you?'

'I've got something to think about. Don't mind me.'

Mrs Hope was confronted in the drawing-room by a vision of muslin and lace, very much in contrast to herself. Her visitor was a patient of Dr Hope, the wife of a solicitor in Arlingford. Her husband's country place was not far from Alveston, and she came a good deal to the Hollies, not greatly to Mrs Hope's pleasure. She was a young, childish creature, thoughtless as she was

pretty, whom her husband had married apparently for the sake of her bright face, and—her fortune. Before marriage she had been a ball-room belle, not to say flirt, and seemed still inclined to keep up the latter character. ‘Gentlemen all admire her,’ so Mrs Hope had been told by a common acquaintance, which sentence, spoken by one woman to another, is not the highest praise.

‘Nathless,’ as the Scotch say, I believe we are often hard upon one another, very hard, we who ought to be so tender and pitiful. And there may be a little envy at the root of the hardness. a little hurt knowledge that *we* are not dangerously attractive. But it is pleasanter not to call things by their right names. The hardest kind of truth-telling is truth to oneself.

Yet, on the other hand, a woman’s fine consciousness will detect wrong, and shrink from it, even when she can hardly justify the shrinking. Let her only remember that the wrong-doer is her sister-woman still.

‘I don’t think I ought to be here at this time of day,’ said Mrs Stretton, in answer to Mrs Hope’s not very eager greeting, ‘but I wanted so much to see the Doctor, and I thought I should be sure of him after dinner.’

‘He’s away for the day with the girls ; but I expect them home soon. Will you wait ?’

‘Thank you, yes : I should be glad.’

Mrs Hope determined to do her best to be agreeable, much aided by the reflection that her visitor could not know how disagreeable she felt. Rather an uncer-

tain conclusion, by the way, for few are without the sixth sense, which can detect reality through seeming.

They chatted away, however, without much difficulty for some time, and then came a dead lock, which seemed likely enough to last. But Mrs Stretton, after carelessly turning over some drawings, which she scarcely looked at, suddenly broke out with—‘It’s very quiet here; I can’t think how you bear it.’

‘I like it,’ said Mrs Hope, looking up from her work at the unquiet face opposite her.

‘Yes, I should think you do; you look as if you toned with it. I never should.’

‘I can always find plenty to do. And you, I daresay, find Eastham very dull: but you have your children.’

‘Indeed I have,—little tiresome things! I mean,’ she added, with flushing colour, ‘of course, one loves them dearly, but they are such a perpetual trouble, always in the way; if not literally, figuratively. However, my nurse is a treasure, I can leave them to her quite happily.’

‘Are they girls or boys?’

‘Two of both;—they’re bonnie little things, all of them,’ and the softened fall of the voice showed the mother after all.

‘People insist that mothers are more fond of boys than girls, but I fancy it is only that one’s ownership in them is slighter. They drift beyond reach so soon, out on the wide sea, where one can only follow them with love and longing.’

‘They’ll soon forget. One may as well prepare oneself for what must be.’

‘But one would rather make it hard work for them. There are some links that won’t break, if one knows how to fasten them.’

Mrs. Stretton did not reply. She was gazing from the window, in a fit of musing.

‘I think I shall act for the Doctor till he returns,’ said Mrs Hope, ‘and make you lie down on the sofa.’

She laughed, a little bitterly. ‘He’s always telling me to be quiet. I won’t—I can’t. If I were to be quiet I should go mad.’

‘Hush,’ said Mrs Hope, gently: ‘do take off your hat and rest.’

‘Rest!’ There came a burst of passionate tears, and then, exhausted after them, she consented to lie down.

‘I am so ashamed of myself,’ she said, as she grew calmer. ‘I never let tears be seen if I can help it. Generally, like the little maid in Guinevere:—

‘I cry my cry in silence and have done,

None knows it, and my tears have brought me,

not “good;” they won’t bring me that, ever. But I was tired to day, and every now and then things come over one, and seeing this still sweet life of yours made me—’ Here the tears broke forth again. Mrs Hope did not try to soothe them. Better they should come.

‘There is trouble in every life,’ she said after awhile, ‘though it isn’t always seen from the outside.’

'Is there in yours?' But without giving time to reply she went on. 'I don't believe it. Or, if there is, it's a happy kind of trouble that brings its own comfort, not like mine.'

'Trouble never brings *its own* comfort. But does not God give it if we ask Him?'

'God!' Her lips curled. 'Not for troubles we have made ourselves, as I made mine. I married, thinking love would come, *and it didn't.*'

Poor child, for she was hardly more,—it was difficult to know what to say to this. Mrs Hope only kissed her, and let the tears she could not keep back, mingle with hers.

'So, you see,' she murmured at last, 'there's no comfort for me. I cannot undo the past.'

'But God can forgive it, and give you such rest in himself that you may be strong to bear the future. He bindeth up the broken in heart. He bids the weary ones come to Him, the One true Comforter.'

'Go on,' she said, laying her hand on the speaker's, 'the words are sweet.'

So Mrs Hope went on, telling once more the old, old story of forgiveness through the blood of the Lamb, of healing in His love, for the deep wounds which know no earthly help.

'I know it all,' she replied, 'at least I did know it once. And sometimes I have thought of it when I've been very wretched. But it seemed too good to be ever

true for me. I could not go to Him, that pure holy Saviour. I am, too—you don't know what I am.'

'But He knows. Listen to His own words, there is no question about fitness: only,—“Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.”'

And here the sound of wheels ended their talk.

'Leslie,' said Mrs Hope, as she and her husband sat together in the drawing-room that same evening, after Claude and Lillas, weary with their day, had retired, 'do you know that Charlie Grahame comes here a great deal?'

'Does he?' said the Doctor absently, 'well, poor fellow, let him come. He'll be none the worse for having a home house to turn to.'

'But it strikes me he'll be trying to make a home of his own.'

'Nonsense. That's like a woman,—always going out to meet contingencies.'

But he laid down his newspaper now. 'What makes you think so?'

'I don't know. I never can tell where my ideas come from;—out of cloud-land, I suppose. I'll try and send this one back there.'

Mrs Hope folded away her work, and then spoke of something else, as if she had dismissed the subject from her mind, which of course she had not.

The Doctor meanwhile began to pace the room. 'You don't mean Lily?' he said, at last.

‘It’s a question of what *he* means. But I think he admires Claude.’

‘Very likely. A man may “love some bright particular star, and think to wed it.” I don’t know though. Charlie’s on the road to success, so far as position goes. He’ll make his way. A while ago I had my fears for him, but he has pulled up wonderfully. Henderson says he is as steady as the church clock, and reasonably clever. Claude might do worse. And, now I remember, he *has* been here pretty often, whenever I’ve been over, at any rate. And she doesn’t seem to dislike him. I had an idea she was engaged, though. I’m sure I heard so, but I suppose not. I *hope* not; it would be a pity for Charlie if she led him on white ice.’

The wife laughed. ‘What of going out to meet contingencies?’

‘Contingencies are coming to meet us, I think,’ said the Doctor, as he walked to the window, whence, for the blinds were not drawn, he could see up the village street, —isn’t that Charlie’s figure? What can have sent him at this time of night!’

He went to meet him at the gate, and Mrs Hope watched the two dark figures pacing together up and down the gravel, apparently in earnest talk. Then Charlie went off without coming into the house.

‘He came with a message from Henderson,’ said the Doctor, when he returned. ‘He wanted to see me about Winnie as I drove through to-morrow. But I told him

I meant to stay another day ; I can manage it well enough. And then he said something for himself ; it was well you had prepared me, Edith.'

'About Claude ? Why couldn't he speak to herself ?'

Of course he will, but he asked my permission first. I suppose he thought I was a sort of guardian. Besides, I fancy he's pretty sure of his ground.'

But Mrs Hope inwardly thought that could not be.





CHAPTER XI.

UNDER GREEN LEAVES.

MERRY voices, children's laughter, groups here and there on shady grass, white covered tables, with the inevitable cups and buns. It was a fair scene, in the early evening light, though it was only a school treat, and country children are by no means picturesque objects, except in story-books. The Wares had long been in the habit of making this annual gathering a sort of village festival. So it had been in old Mrs Ware's time ; and though there was as yet no young Mrs Ware to take her place, the Squire and his sisters kept up the old custom. They invited a good many people from the neighbourhood as well, combining with the children's treat a rambling out-of-door party for a rather heterogeneous mixture of guests. The Hopes were there of course. It was the day following the various 'talks' of our last chapter, and Claude had

begged to be left with Winnie, pleading headache from fatigue.

But all the rest had gone, even the Doctor. He would have wondered at himself once for caring to be there, but to-day he had even acceded to Mr Ware's request, that he would say a few words, not by way of a sermon, but just a homely familiar talk, to the parents who were to assemble afterwards.

'It's all new to me,' he objected, 'I've been too much in the way of thinking of men and women as all *body*. But, perhaps, it's not too late, though I do not believe the work that ought to be done in the day can be made up at the evening time.'

It was much for him to say, but his life had changed within the last year or two, and he was gradually realising that on every Christian man there lies the stamp of God's ownership.

Mr Thornton, too, was in his place,—every inch 'the vicar.' In his secret heart he hated these days, and never breathed freely for a week before. He had to speak to the children, and that was hard work. He believed he was expected to play with them, and that was still harder. He groaned over the whole thing, and wished himself back in College cloisters.

In good truth it was a mistake that he had ever left them. His sermons,—very good sermons in their way,—always seemed to end in the air, without any particular application to anything or anybody. The people heard

them without listening. In fact there were not many who even heard, for the congregation became smaller and smaller, and the service drearier and more dreary. The good man was grievously discouraged at it, for he had a deep feeling that his people were a charge given him from God. But he watched over them as a mass, not as individuals, and so he never gained their personal confidence, or drew one step nearer to them. Perhaps, on the whole, the evil lay in his having lived so entirely among men. The other half of life, the woman's side of it, he had not seen since he was a school-boy. His world, until his marriage at least, was a world of thought and action, very learned thought and very dignified action,—or else something quite the reverse of both. But of all the wide space between, filled up with home loves and cares, with daily struggle and loss,—he knew almost as little as if it belonged to another planet. And, as this very space was the level of most lives around him, it came to pass that he seldom touched or reached them, or, if he did, it was in such awkward, constrained fashion, that neither party was helped by the contact.

So the vicar wandered about, growing stiffer and stiffer every minute, and feeling as if his cravat must choke him before the children got to the end of their buns, and the time would come for that terrible speech. For what to say he had not the most vague idea. And his little wife watched him, with a feeling that something was wrong, and a helpless longing to be wise

enough to set it right. Once, not so long ago, she would have liked dearly to throw herself among the wee things for a down-right play, but she did not feel inclined for it to-night. Her face is changed since we saw her first. It has the look now of a woman who has taken up her burden, and braced herself to bear it as bravely as she may—a look, half steadfast, half weary, but touchingly meek and patient withal. She was standing a little aside from the rest,—for most of the party were gathered about the hall-door, to watch the procession of children file up from the village, winding in and out among the trees of the park,—a line of sound and colour now appearing, now lost again in silence and green. A light cross-fire of conversation was going on meanwhile, but Mrs Thornton hardly heard it, though there was a graver strain to which she appeared not quite so deaf. The vicar and Miss Ware were talking earnestly not far from her, apparently about some parish matter, for the vicar remarked,—

‘I’m glad to know your opinion, though I don’t agree in it. But ladies judge better in such matters than College tutors. I daresay you are right.’

‘*I know* I’m right,’ said Miss Ware, ‘but I hate that kind of concession. Why not put the question on its own merits?’

‘Well,’ said the vicar, ‘you have told me your conclusion, now show me how you reach it?’

‘That is so difficult,’ said Mrs Thornton, joining in, ‘I never can tell why I think a thing.’

Miss Ware's lips curled slightly, while Mr Thornton's grew grave. Evidently he would rather she had not spoken. And her pained flush a minute after, showed that she understood.

'Shall we walk towards the gate?' said Mrs Hope, coming up to her, 'the children must be almost here.'

'Thank you;' she looked at her husband, but he was too much absorbed to see. And there came a little smothered sigh.

'This day reminds me so of our school-treats at home,' she said, and Mrs Hope could hear the tears in her voice, though they were carefully kept back from her eyes. 'But I ought not to mind it,' she added, hastily, 'Edward is so good.'

'And one home,' said Mrs Hope, trying to give a turn to her thoughts, 'is always near, the home of our dear Lord's love.'

'No, it seems to me very far off. I mean,—I know it's very wrong of me, but I can never quite feel as if it made any difference. Don't call me wicked, please, a clergyman's wife, to speak so. I don't think I'm fit to be one. I felt I was not all the time before, only Edward never would believe me when I told him so. But he is so good and wise, and I,—I can only love him,' and the soft yearning eyes told how truly this was done.

'I always feel as if we didn't stand together,—as if he were, oh, so far above me, that when I reach out my hand to him, he must stoop to take it. If I had only

been by his side, I could have shared his thoughts, and helped him better.'

Not one woman in a thousand would have made that confession ; but it was like Alice Thornton.

'Perhaps we don't any of us stand quite by our husband's side.'

'But we need not be so far apart, that we can't hear each other speak.'

Just then, to Mrs Hope's relief, the children came up, so she only whispered, 'We can always hear one Voice.'

The vicar's speech was certainly a wonder in its way,—as far removed from the child-world he was trying to reach, as if he spoke from the moon. Arthur Ware, host as he was, and Squire to boot, could not help wincing under the infliction. He was obliged to console himself by watching Liliás on duty among the infants, as she contended vainly with fidgetting, scratching, pinching, suppressed explosions of laughter, and unsuppressed yawns, not to mention other indescribable and perpetual motion of heads, hands, and feet. He saw her at last take possession of a small boy in black velveteen, who, on the strength of being the postmaster's son, and one of the village 'upper ten,' had defied all other attempts to make him good. He looked very sullen at first, but soon seemed to think it rather an honour to be promoted to sit near 'Miss Liliás.' Finally, overcome by the proprieties of his position, he fell fast asleep, bringing his little red head down in thumps upon her shoulder at

intervals. And over all Mr Thornton's periods flowed on and on, and heavy listless eyes stared blankly up to the sky, which was not much further above them.

'How many of those sentences,' whispered Mr Ware to Lily, when at last the address was ended, 'do you suppose could find their way into any child's brain?'

Lily shook her head. 'None went into mine; but I thought I was dense.' And then she turned off again to the children.

Still he stood, watching her play with them; a sight pretty enough, and suggestive in its way,—how the shy ones clung to her, and the dullest faces brightened under her smile into a kind of flitting, sunshiny life.

All at once there was a cry of distress. A wee child had fallen and torn its frock, and an elder sister was administering a sharp rebuke. Lillias and Arthur arrived together at the scene of disaster.

'A new frock! Well, it was a pity, Martha, but I don't think she could help it, and she's very sorry—arn't you, little Jeanie?'

And Lily knelt on the grass, to try and pin up the rent, while Jeanie took her fat fingers out of her eyes, and looked as if, after all, there might be some hope left in life.

'I'll come and see your mother to-morrow, Martha, and tell her it was an accident.'

'She'll scold,' said the girl, doggedly.

'Perhaps not—there, don't cry, little one'—and in a

few minutes she had both the children happy, playing with the rest.

‘These Dixons have a wretched home,’ she said, as Arthur joined her again—‘their mother is always whining when she doesn’t scold, and one does not know how to help her.’

‘I wish sometimes there was an asylum for *incapables* as well as *incurables*.’

‘If one could put some hope into her life—some heart to struggle—but one can’t; she always falls back to the same place.’

‘Have you worked much among the poor?’

‘No, indeed. I have only just begun. I do nothing but make mistakes.’

‘Perhaps the experience comes through the mistakes—it isn’t a commodity that can be stored up and imparted. We only learn to do anything by doing it. But you women are better off than we, for where you can’t see you can feel; and the fine touch is better than the keen sight.’

Both were silent then, looking off towards the sunset—

‘Doesn’t this country seem flat to you,’ asked Lily, ‘after the Swiss mountains?’

‘In one sense—not in another. It has its own beauty. But the mountains are grand. You have seen them?’

‘No. We hope to go next year.’

'I don't know how it is,—but the getting among them always seems to help to higher views, even of what has to do with the spirit's life. You have left mists behind for a space. You are lifted up where they cannot dim the clearness, and you breathe light and rest.'

'There are days like that, I think,' said Lily, 'when one gets a glimpse from mountain heights—not material. But it is only a glimpse.'

The deep eyes looked far into hers.

'Perhaps; but life can never be again what it would have been if one had not seen it.'

It was a little word, but Lily was glad of it. It would help her after to-day.

Mrs Hope, meanwhile, had been getting into another thread of talk. It seemed to her sometimes, as if her 'doing good among the poor' were exchanged for a different sort of work, indefinite and desultory enough, and only to be picked out in fragments here and there. But perhaps the new was as true as the old.

The children had separated for various games, in which the younger ladies were helping, while some of the older ones were glad of rest, after the heat and bustle of filling cups and handing cake.

'Come with me,' said a voice at Mrs Hope's side, 'I want you for a minute.'

It was Mrs Stretton; for she, too, was of the party 'I won't keep you long,' she said, as they turned down a

little shady path which led to the flower-garden ; ' but I must speak to you. Do you remember what you said last night ?'

She stopped, catching her breath painfully. ' About what ?' said Mrs Hope.

' About comfort—that we might ask God for it. Would it be any use—any use *for me* ?'

' I will give you His words—they are better than mine : --" When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them ; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them."'

' I never can find those things in my Bible—it doesn't speak to me as it does to you.'

' Perhaps you have not tried to listen long. There may be silence for a while ; but Christ's own voice will break it, and *that* brings comfort.'

' Comfort !' There was a weary longing sigh, which showed how it was needed.

' I thought once, when I first found out how wretched I was, that I would find a kind of comfort in the " things " about me. Many women do that—try and put their hearts into " things," or rather to smother them with " things," so that they may not hear them cry. But they will cry !'—and Mrs Hope knew, by the hard clutch of her fingers, as they lay on her arm, that for her the cry was of sharp agony.

' Is not that better than silence ?' she asked. ' One

would not choose death rather than life, even with its suffering.'

'Well,' she answered, with a hollow laugh, 'I don't believe in deadened sensation, either mental or physical. I've tried it. Pain will wake, the keener for sleep, while it is there at all. And for me, it must be, always—always.'

'Then you need all the more strength to endure. *He* giveth power to the faint, and the burden of life does not crush us when we know where to lay it.'

'Sometimes I try not to care'—

'*Don't*,' said Mrs Hope, stopping her—'that terrible "*I don't care*," has been the ruin of many a woman's life.'

The restless eyes turned on her with a startled look. 'Do you mean that?'

'I do mean it—I want you to mean it too. I cannot bear to think of it for you.'

Perhaps the one heart, in the strong yearning, touched the other as she spoke. 'And do you really care what becomes of me? I thought no one did.'

'*One cares*—He who has loved you always. Who loves you now. Will you not try and remember this, and let the thought hold you back when'—

She stopped, but her listener understood.

'If one could really feel that, there would be some hope in one's life. I had given up trying to mend it, it seemed so spoiled and broken; but if He would love me — if I could make it fit for Him to love.'—

‘You cannot do that ; but He will love it as it is—you have only to take it to Him. That is what He asks from each—not a perfect life, but just the one we have to give Him, stained with sin and tears.’

‘And then ?’

‘Then, from the old, His Spirit raises a new life in himself. He died,—He lives to do it. Will He refuse ?’

Claude and Winnie, meanwhile, were spending the evening quietly at home. They had taken to one another wonderfully,—these two. Claude’s merry, kittenish ways brought some healthful stir and freshness into the invalid’s life ; and Winnie’s silent patience was not lost upon her cousin’s keen observation, though she started, in utter wilful horror, at anything she called ‘preaching.’

‘Yes, dear,’ she said once, in answer to some remark of Winnie’s;—‘but don’t talk to me in that strain, I won’t have it. It makes me angry,—and I don’t want to be angry with you, it would be too hard work. Poor little Winnie’—and she bent over the slight figure, with a shining in her eyes, that looked liked tears.

‘You need not pity me, Claude,’ Winnie had replied. ‘I’ve got something you haven’t.’

‘Yes, that’s true,’ was the half-sobbing answer. And years afterwards the words were remembered.

To-day, however, Claude was unusually restless. She took up her tatting, and got the thread into an inextricable tangle. She offered to read aloud, but she lost her

place three times in a page. Then she turned to the piano, and sang a few bars, first of one song and then another, till Winnie's nerves were strained beyond endurance. Finally, discovering this, she went out of doors with a volume of Tennyson, and left her to rest.

Her reading was not more successful there, however. She wandered on, the book in her hand, till she came to a favourite spot where the lime-tree boughs arched over a clear trout stream, which divided the garden at this point from the fields beyond. A little further on the stream widened and parted round a reedy islet, reflecting the sky and clouds, and soft low-lying water meadows, with here and there a clump of silvery willows.

Claude threw herself on the grass; but she did not watch the sunshine creeping sleepily among the leaves, or quivering on the water, where fish darted by like shadows in the weedy bottom, or now and then a water-rat started with sudden splash. Her eyes went further away, to a point where she could see, through an opening in the trees, the grey gables of Alveston Hall.

'Foolish I was, not to go with the rest,' she muttered; 'I should have seen him once in his own home, where I might have been.'

She fell into a long reverie, not pleasant, apparently, for her face grew pale, and her eyes dark, as she sat; but it was disturbed by footsteps near her.

'Mr Grahame!' She started up in some vexation. In her present mood Charlie was not exactly welcome.

'They are all at the Hall except Winnie and me,' she said.

'Oh, are they?' Charlie's attempt at surprise was a failure, but it did not seem to trouble him. He leaned against a tree, and slashed the leaves with his riding-whip, wishing Claude would sit down again, that he might have an excuse for sitting down too.

'I saw your white dress through the leaves as I rode past,—and it was too tempting. Are you any the worse for yesterday?—you look'—

'Yes, I'm tired,' said Claude impatiently; 'that is the reason I didn't go with the rest. And, besides, I wanted to be with Winnie;—we shall be parted soon.'

'You're not going away?'

'Yes,—to-morrow.'

More destruction of leaves followed. Charlie seemed to have undertaken a war of extermination.

'Are you coming into the house?' said Claude, stooping to pick up her book. She seemed to be in a different mood from any he had seen her in before. There were no shy looks to-day through the long lashes, no pouting of the pretty rosy lips. If she would have been cross and contradictory, he would have liked her better, but he must take her as she was, for he had come to try his fate.

'Shall you be here another summer?' he asked, as they turned down a shady walk.

'I can't tell. I think not. Most likely we shall be abroad.'

‘Claude,—Miss Raynor,’ he began in desperation,—for she was walking fast, and in another moment they would be in full view of the windows; ‘may I—I must speak to you,—one word.’

‘Certainly,’ said Claude, facing about, and looking straight at him. She knew that the moment had come,—she must make the best of it. Charlie blushed under her steady gaze, up to the roots of his fair hair. It was very awkward. She must understand what he meant to say; why did she take it so coolly? She had not looked so calm the last time he was here, when he picked up some flowers she had thrown away, and wore them for the rest of the afternoon. He had watched the colour then, rising in a flush over cheek and brow; why did it not come now, instead of his, that made him look so boyish?

She only stood opposite to him, however, and waited,—her head a little bent forward, and one hand swinging her hat, which she had thrown off.

‘I wished,’ Charlie began again; ‘I thought—that is, I intended,—I’m afraid you must think me very abrupt, Miss Raynor, but I could not let you go without telling you.’—

Charlie’s hesitation vanished now; and in a few straight-forward manly words, he told the story of his love,—how it had grown, suddenly, indeed,—yet not so much so, but that its roots had struck deep.

Claude listened. She had heard the same tale not

once nor twice before, and paid little heed to it,—but it touched her strangely to-day. What if she should accept him after all? He loved her, and she was very miserable.

A softened look came into her face, and Charlie took courage. Might he not hope? He would wait,—he could not offer her yet a home worthy of her, but he should be able to do so soon. Would she not give him one little word of encouragement, and he would go on working so bravely to win her?

Poor Charlie,—that last stroke had told against him. It recalled Claude,—as she would have said,—‘to her senses.’ The idea of her marrying a man with only ‘good prospects!’ It was not to be thought of.

‘I’m very sorry, Mr Grahame,’ she said; ‘you have taken me completely by surprise, and’—

‘I know I have been too sudden,’ he said; ‘but you will forgive me. I could not bear the thought of losing you;—I cannot bear it now.’

He tried to take her hand, but she drew it away, and stepped back.

‘No, Mr Grahame,—don’t say any more, please; indeed I cannot listen to you, I have heard too much already.’

‘But Claude, I thought, I hoped, that you would not be quite unprepared,—I thought you cared’—

‘That could not be, Mr Grahame,’ said Claude quietly; ‘you must have misunderstood;’ Claude’s

cheeks grew crimson now, however, and she would have been glad of her hat to cover them. She tried to hide her confusion, by turning towards the house, but Charlie would not take her refusal so easily. He pleaded on and on, till at last she stopped him, almost angrily,—

‘I cannot, Mr Grahame. I cannot give what you ask me. I should be wronging you if I did.’

‘You *have* wronged me,’ said Charlie then, convinced at last that *now* she meant what she said.

He turned from her with a look which, to her dying day, she never forgot. ‘God forgive you, Claude Raynor, —you have ruined my life.’





CHAPTER XII.

A GLIMPSE OF TRUTH.

LATE that evening, as the Hopes were walking home through the park, they met a figure advancing in the opposite direction, striding along with the reckless haste of one who is trying to walk down some strong emotion. What Charlie Grahame did after he left Claude in the garden, he could not himself have told, but his horse was left where he was fastened, till one of the villagers found him, and brought him to Dr Hope's stable.

Why, Charlie, is that you ?' said the Doctor. Charlie scarcely spoke. He shook hands with each, and then hurried on again, Dr Hope looked at his wife—' Shall I overtake him ?'

'I think you might, as he spoke to you yesterday.' For neither doubted that he had been to the Hollies. So Dr Hope followed, gaining rapidly, with his de-

terminated steps, on Charlie's unequal pace. The two ladies hastened homewards alone.

In silence—for Mrs Hope was tired, and Lily did not feel inclined to talk. She only answered, when Mrs Hope asked, if she had enjoyed herself, 'Yes, so much—I was just thinking how pleasant everything was!'

She could not have told wherein the pleasantness consisted. It was too subtle to be analysed. She only knew that it had penetrated everything, even the cutting up of currant loaves; and that now, as she pondered it all, it seemed as if this day must always stand out as one of the golden ones of memory.

And Arthur Ware, as he went to sleep that night, thought how much pleasure there was in making others happy. He might live for this, though he had felt, eighteen months ago, as if life were hardly worth having. *That* dream was dreamed; he was thankful now even for the bitter waking. Better it should come too soon than too late. And, after all, the common daylight was not altogether dreary, especially when it showed a picture so fair, as Lily Hope among the village children.

Dr Hope soon joined his ladies, as they sat in Winnie's sitting-room, telling her and Claude the story of the day. Claude glanced up at him as he entered, from her nook by the curtained window, and then shrank back into it with a sort of shiver, as if a cold wind had touched her. For a set, stern look was upon his face, and something told her she had brought it

there. There was no more talking after that. Winnie was carried to bed, and general good-nights followed. For all but Claude. Her uncle's hand was on her shoulder as she turned to leave the room.

'Stay here a moment, I want to speak to you.'

She obeyed with an air of indifference she did not feel, throwing herself into a low chair, and hiding a pretended yawn.

'Claude,' said her uncle, standing opposite her—he was in no mood to sit—'What have you been doing to Charlie Grahame?'

Claude threw her head back, like a wild creature at bay. 'What right have you to ask me?'

The defiance of the tone gave him back the self-control he had nearly lost. He was silent a minute, and when he spoke again, his voice was perfectly clear and calm.

'The right which one human being has to inquire, why the happiness of another should be recklessly sacrificed.'

'Mr Grahame has chosen to take you into his confidence,' said Claude, in the same haughty tone. 'If he had kept his own counsel, I should not have betrayed him.'

'I do not doubt that,' said her uncle, coldly. 'Miss Raynor would scarcely, for her own sake, have betrayed her own wrong-doing.'

'But, uncle,' Claude began, more humbly, 'I could

not accept a man I did not care for ; it would have been—wrong,' she was going to add, but the word seemed to die upon her lips.

'Then why did you allow him to suppose you cared for him?'

'I—I could not tell,' faltered Claude. 'I did not understand —.'

'Silence, Claude,' said her uncle, sternly ; 'don't make bad worse. Listen to me,' he added, for he saw her again about to speak, 'shall I tell you what you have done this day? You had a treasure offered you—the treasure of an honest love—and you have thrown it back with scorn. You have done worse, for you knew that it would be offered,—this most costly gift,—the purest man *can* give to woman—so costly, that the crown and flower of his whole being is included in it, and you led him on to lay it at your feet, although you never intended even to stoop for it. I tell you, Claude, these are the things which so often ruin men's lives. They lose their faith in woman, and, through her, they lose their faith in God. The link is broken which binds them to nobleness, and purity, and truth—you women break it with your own hands, carelessly, as you would unfasten a ribbon which ties your hair, and they drift out on the sea of life, wrecks of all they might have been.'

'They break faith, too, sometimes,' said Claude; sullenly.

‘They break faith—yes—and why? Too often—not always, but too often—because you have taught them Depend upon it, one woman who teaches a man such a lesson as you have taught Charlie Grahame, is guilty of many a broken heart among her sister women—many a blighted, wasted life, many a desolated home. Claude,’—he hesitated a moment, and then went on,—‘I have seen wild eyes and haggard faces, sharp with hunger of body and soul, from which you would have turned with loathing, and I have known that hands as delicate as yours have made them what they were—that their blood was at the door of some fair girl, who would speak of them with bated breath.’

‘He’ll get over it,’ said Claude, at last.

‘Of course he’ll get over it, but how much else will he “get over” at the same time. I tell you, Claude, a “getting over” of all that a man ought to hold highest and purest, leaves a warp in his nature for life.’

Claude made no answer now—she sat with downcast eyes, a long while silent. But then a sudden impulse came over her. She went up to her uncle, and laid her hand half-appealingly on his arm.

‘Forgive me—I’ve had no mother.’ And she looked up at him with her mother’s eyes—the sister Claude of his boyhood.





CHAPTER XIII.

DRIFTED TO SEA.

NO letter from Charlie! Nellie Grahame did not say the words,—there was no one to say them to—for her mother was from home, and their sitting-room solitary. But she thought them, with a little wonder and sorrow, for Charlie's letters hitherto had never missed since his absence, and Nellie had lived upon them and in them more than she herself knew. And now she had hurried back from an evening engagement, almost sure that the night's post must have brought what she longed for. But no. She threw off her hat and jacket, and sat down wearily. A vague foreboding was upon her, which would not be bidden away, because she told herself it was unreasonable. Might not Charlie have been busy? Might not a letter have been lost? Might not fifty things account for what, after all, was nowise remarkable? Yes—but for

all that Nellie was troubled. She did not like this little shadow after so long sunshine. Was it the cloud, like a man's hand, which betokened storm to come?

For these past months had been very bright. Charlie was doing well, and was not that sufficient to make them so? And there were other consequences of Charlie's well-doing, pleasant enough in themselves. The scheme of the shop had faded away with the need for it. And though now and then Nellie remembered that Charlie's fortune might not last, or that he might be inclined to share it with some one else, she put the thought aside, too happy in present good to be careful for the future. Besides, her pupils were on the increase, and another small source of income had opened out, which no one knew but herself. So the outside world went smoothly, and, for the inner, she looked at it as little as possible. The same atmosphere of doubt brooded there as of old; but she had begun to accept the darkness, and to question, half indolently, half hopelessly, if, for any, there were clearer light. And now and then she helped to obscure what rays of it remained, by looking out for perplexity. For her, as for many who have been brought up in a somewhat narrow school of theology, whatever was stamped as unorthodox, possessed an irresistible charm. She went in search of it, not so much in any honest thirst for truth, as in mere delight of wilful daring. She doubted not, because she was inquiring, but because she had grown indifferent.

She spoke of these things, however, to none. Miss May might have counselled her, and wisely, but Nellie knew her only a little, and shrank from knowing more. She felt that the old lady, with her definite faith, and equally definite unbelief, would have little sympathy with hesitations and suspensions. She might have been apt to tell her truth about them, a little too keen in its wholesomeness.

And, since Edith Leigh became Edith Hope, Nellie had held a good deal aloof from her. It vexed her that her one friend should have been absorbed into the whirl of family life, and circled round with its sweet loves and hopes, while she was left standing outside, more still and solitary than ever. She felt a sense of personal injury, which made her very bitter over the 'weakness of women, who could resist nothing in the shape of matrimony.' And she visited the offender's wrong, by withdrawing from anything like the close intercourse of former days, thereby punishing herself not a little, and feeling a certain gloomy satisfaction in so doing. Yet still, the one life touched the other, and, unconsciously blessed it. 'She is real,' Nellie said; and she felt the power of a Christianity which she sometimes professed to scorn.

There was no letter. For a while Nellie sat and thought; but her nature was too restless to make long musing possible. She opened her piano, and began to play. The room was half-dark, but she would not have the gas. The moon-beams streamed into it from a cloud-

less sky, and she needed no other lamp. Her music, for the most part, welled up out of her heart, and she could read it by its own light.

Music, indeed, was Nellie's special gift. Her whole nature bloomed out in it, and found its rest,—such rest as any *may* find, short of the highest. And lately she had begun to link words with sound,—words which came to her, she knew not whence. But they were born of her own dreams. One such song she had sent, in a wild venture, to a celebrated musical publisher. It was accepted, with a request for more ; and many little comforts, which her mother wondered over, were the result.

But to-night she could think of nothing. Her fingers wandered into an old waltz of Beethoven's she had learned when a child, and would turn themselves nowhere else. She played it over and over, thinking of Charlie.

All at once she heard a step in the hall. She listened—could it be ? No, surely ! But yes, the door opened, and Charlie stood beside her.

And yet, *was* it Charlie ? The moonlight showed a wild haggard face—his—but oh ! so changed. And his voice, when he spoke, sounded hollow, almost weird.

‘You didn't expect me.’

‘No, indeed—I wondered there was no letter. But it was like you, to surprise us. Mamma will be home to-morrow—how pleased she'll be. Oh, it's good to see you !’

Her arms were round his neck, and his held her in a close, strained embrace, but he said nothing.

‘I’ll ring for a light—you must want something after your journey.’

‘No, don’t :—I—I can’t stay long, Nellie’—and one arm held her tighter, while the other hand played in the old brotherly fashion, with her hair ; but she started as it touched her. It was cold as death.

‘Charlie, are you ill?’

‘No.’

‘But I’m sure there is something the matter. You’re not yourself.’

‘Myself!’—he laughed bitterly—‘Yes, I think I am, Nellie—such a self as it is.’

Nellie shuddered. ‘But tell me, Charlie.’

‘I’ve nothing to tell—nothing you will like to hear. And yet I don’t know why you should mind.’

‘Has anything happened between you and Dr Henderson?’

‘I have left him.’

‘Left him!—Oh Charlie, what have you been doing.’

‘Nothing’—the word came with something very like an oath—‘Why should you be so sure of that?’

‘I don’t know—I didn’t mean,’—said Nellie, confusedly. She did not like to seem to blame, and yet she could hardly help supposing that Charlie was wrong. But he did not give her time to speak.

‘I am going to Liverpool.’

‘To Liverpool!’

‘Yes, and from thence to New York.’

‘New York, Charlie!’ She could say no other word for a long while; then she looked up.

‘Tell me I’m dreaming, Charlie.’

‘It’s a dark dream if it’s like mine, Nellie, and the waking darker. No, it is no dream that I must leave you, but I think everything else is, before and behind.’

‘But you are not going.’

‘I’ve paid my passage.’

‘But mother,—you’ll break her heart.’

‘Nonsense,’ he answered, bitterly. ‘People don’t die of broken hearts except in story-books—they only live with them.’

‘But tell me why?’

‘Because I must go either there, or to ruin.’

‘And the whole story came out, in half-uttered, broken sentences,—the story of a life spoiled. Nellie listened, too sore at heart to speak. But at length she found her voice.

‘Charlie, I won’t say anything about it—it’s all too terrible. Only—only—don’t be angry with me’—and her warm lips pressed the hand she held—‘would it not be nobler, braver, to stay and grapple with it—the sorrow I mean—to stay and fight it out manfully, than to fly from it?’

‘Very likely,’ he answered, coldly—‘I do only what I must. I’m a coward, I suppose.’

So he was. Charlie Grahame never spoke a truer word. And yet, during the last four months, he had been slowly gaining moral strength, through steadfast moral striving. His character had daily grown in force as well as in depth. A noble, manful, future was before him, till the touch of one little hand blighted it.

‘At any rate,’ he added, recklessly, ‘its too late now—the die is cast—I have paid my passage—I must take my chance. I’ve got two hours, Nellie, and then I must be off.’

How the two hours passed, Nellie never knew; nor how the good-bye was spoken which followed. Spoken, indeed, it was not. Then she was left alone, and the moonlight shone on, clear and still, in the star-lit sky.

No sleep that night; no stillness even; for Nellie paced her room till dawn. Why should such things be? How could they be, if, indeed, He whom men called a God of love, reigned over all? Why should such terrible power be given to one human life to blight another, and that other just rising at last, through many a sore struggle to something worthy the name? All lost now! Nellie looked on through the years, but there seemed no hope for Charlie; nothing but downward sinking—lower and lower till the end.

And yet it might not be. She would pray, and there was help in prayer, men said. She had played with doubts till she hardly believed them; but she would try.

She knelt. It was long since she had knelt before;

for she was too honest, too thoroughly real, to keep up a form she had lost her faith in ; and so day after day passed on without it, while she tried to persuade herself that love and work were prayer, in its truest meaning. Still she turned to it to-night,—

‘Woe being come, the soul is dumb that crieth not on God.’

But yet she could not cry. Her prayers seemed like autumn leaves, torn off in a storm, scattered and lost in darkness. And questions came instead of them,—questions she had touched carelessly—hardly dreaming what they meant. She knew it all now, for refuge failed her in her hour of need. It was a terrible retribution.





CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

THE next evening Nellie was engaged for a musical party. It was not quite the season ; but this was given, so the lady said who sent her the invitation, on account of some friends, a Colonel and Mrs Chesney, with their ward, who had been in England for the summer, and were staying with her a few days before their return to the continent.

‘I want to show them we have some music under these grey skies they are always railing at. There are not many people back from the country ; but we must do what we can. You will be sure to come—I have a surprise for you too.’

‘Yes, I must go,’ Nellie had said to herself, as she read the note, while her lips curled with a little scorn—‘not that these great people care about me. They only want my music.’

She got many such invitations now, for her musical

talent was becoming more and more known, and she was sought, both by those who delighted in it for its own sake, and by those who only wanted it, along with the flowers and pictures they bought at market value, to make their drawing-rooms attractive. Mrs Grahame at first objected. 'It was going into the world,' she said. But Nellie replied, 'Your world and mine are different, mamma; I don't go into yours—I belong to it.' And so the poor old lady had sorrowfully given way. She prayed for her child during her absence, and, it must be confessed, grumbled at her when she returned,—which last did not greatly help to bring her over from her own world to her mother's.

Nellie's chaperone, on this particular evening, was a lady who was often good-natured enough to perform that office. She had taken a great fancy to her; and though Nellie's pride sometimes turned restive under the manifestation of it, the two, for the most part, 'got on' well enough. But Mrs Hunt was a shallow, frivolous woman, whom Nellie in her heart despised—despising herself still more for having anything to do with her.

'I'm sorry to have kept you waiting,' she said, as she stepped into Mrs Hunt's carriage. 'I was late in going up to dress, and I could not find my things. And some perverse spirit came over them,—hair was troublesome; geraniums refractory; stalks brittle; loose leaves drooping; there were buttons that wouldn't fasten, and pins that would slip out.'

Mrs Hunt had never dressed without a maid in her life. The perversity of buttons and pins was a force she had never contended with. She did not know how much concentrated irritation there is in it. She laughed, however,—an indolent sort of laugh, that often vexed Nellie.

‘Is that what makes you look so—so not yourself to-night?’ she said, as the gleam of the lamps showed her a worn, weary face. ‘My dear, you don’t take life easy, as I do. And what are you wearing?’ she added, turning back Nellie’s cloak—‘black, white, scarlet; yes that will do.’

It was a simple toilette, but it had an advantage which many more elaborate ones miss, that of toning perfectly with the style of the wearer. Nellie was a full-browed brunette, with black hair and dazzling teeth. Her features were scarcely regular, the nose decidedly retroussée; but there was a certain piquancy and brilliance about the face, which made up for its want of downright beauty.

So thought a gentleman who was standing by Mrs Penrhyn’s chair, when Mrs Hunt and Miss Grahame entered her drawing-room. ‘There she is,’ said the lady; ‘I’ll introduce you directly.’

She went forward to receive her guests, and then turned to present Mr Macdonald to Miss Grahame. Nellie did not catch the name, and if she had, would scarcely, so preoccupied was she, have recognised it as

that of the gentleman who had accepted her songs. He was in fact a distant connection of Mrs Penryhn, who from real interest in Nellie had taken this opportunity of bringing them together.

Nellie shrank away from the brilliant lights into a quiet corner, where she often sat, and began to turn over some engravings. She did not see that her hostess looked annoyed, and that her chaperone evidently thought her incomprehensible. She longed only to be still, and, till music began, she surely might be. She placed a book of etchings on the stand, and turned a leaf now and then, but she saw only Charlie's face, and looked at it till her own grew white.

'Those are very fine,' said Mr Macdonald, sauntering up to her.

'Yes,' said Nelly, dreamily. Why could he not leave her in peace, she wondered! So he did, in respect of requiring any answer; for, whatever might be the reason of her mood, he had discernment enough to catch it. He talked himself—she might listen or not, as she chose—and though at first she heard only a word now and then, which told her that the engravings suggested descriptions of foreign travel, a confused mingling of Venice and Rome, Naples and Florence; yet, after awhile, her attention was fairly won, and she gave Mr Macdonald at least the reward of answering with her eyes. He drew her on gradually to something more, and, in time, drew her out as well, till she charmed him

with sense and originality, both brightened by little ripples and sparkles of most winsome playfulness. And yet, in the midst of it all, a certain look would come over her, whenever a chance word struck the pain that was lying asleep,—a look so sad, so forlorn, that Mr Macdonald's heart was touched. For he had daughters of his own, and the thought of them made him tender.

But Nellie was not permitted much quiet. A summons to the piano made her face change again—not a pleasant change this time, for it grew a little cold and proud. She loved music—loved it with an absorbing passion; but she did not love being obliged to amuse other people with it. And so her first piece, though brilliant, was given with more scorn than softness; and she rose abruptly when she had finished, as if she had ended an unpleasant duty.

'Claude,' said Mrs Penrhyn, coming up at that moment, 'you and Miss Grahame must sing something together—your voices will just suit. Here, I want to introduce you—Miss Raynor—Miss —, my dear, are you ill? What is it—the room too hot? Let me . . .

'It's nothing,' said Nellie, recovering herself by a strong effort; 'but I can't sing to-night, Mrs Penrhyn.'

'Can't you? Oh dear, how very unfortunate! What shall we do if you break down!'

'Come into the conservatory for a minute,' said Mr Macdonald, coming quietly between her and Mrs Penrhyn's lamentations. And Claude took her place at the

piano, never dreaming that the dark girl who moved away from her so haughtily, was Charlie Grahame's sister.

That Claude Raynor! Nellie felt as if she could not breathe the same air. Was it for *her* that her one brother, her all of life and love, was this night borne further and further away from her over the wide sea, while her heart must yearn after him till it almost broke? She turned round to watch her, for she could see her plainly from the place where she stood. Claude was talking, while she played, to a young gentleman who stood near her, glancing up at him now and then, as she had glanced at Charlie. Nellie moaned involuntarily.

'I'm sure you are ill,' said Mr Macdonald—'Would you like to go home? I'll get a carriage directly.'

'Oh please,' was her first answer; but she remembered Mrs Penrhyn's disappointment. 'No, I'll stay. I am better now—I'm not ill.' She rose from the seat where he had placed her, and walked a little while among the flowers; and then she went back to the piano, ready to sing, or to do anything that was required of her. For, after the first shock, the sight of this girl had nerved her with sudden strength.

'How do you like her?' said Mrs Penrhyn to Mr Macdonald. No need to specify whom, for all in the room were just drawing breath after the strained hush in which Nellie had kept them.

He smiled. 'She is like her songs—like her own music—wayward and sweet, and a little bit weird. But she shall have all the help I can give her.'

Mrs Penrhyn knew he would keep his word. She foresaw a brilliant future for her protégé, in which she, her first patroness, would shine with some reflected brightness. And she was very honestly glad—first, for Nellie, and then for herself.

A little while after, Claude was startled, as Nellie and she happened for a moment to be standing together, by an inquiry, if 'she left the Hopes well at Alveston?'

'Yes—Do you know them? Are you'—but the words died upon her lips.

'I am Nellie Grahame, Charlie's sister,' was the reply—while the dark eyes flashed till her own fell beneath them. 'Do you know where he is now?' Claude shook her head. 'Where you have sent him,—away from all the hope of his life, on his way to New York.'

Claude played no more that night; and the look and tone haunted her for many a day to come.





CHAPTER XV.

LIGHT.

BUT Nellie's revenge was a very pitiful one, she thought, when again, as the night before, she wandered about her room, too restless for sleep. She knew, now, who her friend of the evening had been. She knew that one consequence of Charlie's departure was prevented, and a proud thrill passed over her that she need owe to no one the means of support for herself and her mother. But all this could not restore what had been lost. It was a good to be thankful for, but it was not Charlie. She went back to her old yearning, 'If I could pray for him!'

It was terrible to be cut off from human help, and yet unable to turn to any higher. What had she been doing? Had she thrown away the sweet faith of her childhood only for this? Had she speculated about prayer till the power to pray was gone? Had she left

herself no stay, no anchorage for the hour of storm and fear?

And then some subtle link of association brought back to her that day at Pentland with the Hopes. How long ago it seemed, like a bit out of another life! Charlie was with her then, and Mrs Hope was Mrs Leigh. That talk with her—she could recall almost every word of it, and especially the close—‘If only our hearts are resting on Christ.’ ‘If only!’ Yes, Nellie knew that in the strength of such rest, she could have borne even this grief. It was because she knew it not, that the sorrow-wave overwhelmed her. She had thought about it; she had doubted and wondered about it; but in earnest she had never sought it. She must seek it now.

And, seeking, she found. Not then. Not till after many days of conflict and darkness. She was not like Lillas, or even Winnie, who had opened their hearts at once to the light which made them glad. She had turned from it so often, that it seemed too much to hope it might now be hers. Christ’s truth about forgiveness through the blood of His cross, was harder to believe than the devil’s lie that the time for forgiveness was past.

And so the winter days which followed fell drearily for Nellie. Drearily, too, came the Christmas, which last year had been so happy,—happy, as it seemed to her the time must always be, when Charlie was at home. She sat late on Christmas Eve—long after her mother

had left her, listening to the winter wind, as it moaned outside—watching the dying firelight, which was her only companion within. And then, rising and falling, sweet and glad, and clear,—came the Christmas bells.

‘Good tidings of great joy.’

Nellie bent her head and sighed. Calmness might come ;—to her perhaps it would, some day long hence,—the frosty calm of a heart in which there is not life enough left to suffer. But joy !

‘Good tidings of great joy!’—again the message rang out. ‘But not for me!’ she murmured, ‘even that joy is not for me. None on earth—none in heaven.’

‘Why not?’ The question sounded as if a living voice asked it, so that Nellie looked up, half startled. ‘Why not? Do you not need it? And is not the Saviour born as on this night, the Healer of the broken in heart, the Giver of rest to the weary?’

She took up her Bible, unopened for many a day, and read on, half listlessly, till she came to those words in St Luke, ‘Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou can’st make me clean.’ A light fell upon her heart—like a revelation. Christ was able, was willing. The link that was missing was, for her to be willing as well as longing. Then she prayed, for the first time for years, though she had often cried out in the darkness towards God, but not unto Him. And, as she prayed, the Healer touched her. She felt that He was near—her Lord, her Life, her All.

Nellie sat with her face in her hands till the Christ-

mas bells had ceased, and long afterwards. But when she lifted it at last, pale though it was and worn, there was rest on brow and lips never seen there before—the seal of peace, which none can give save One,—which He gives to those only who will receive it on His own terms,—‘Except ye be converted, and become as little children.’

Thus it had been given to Nellie Grahame. The sense of utter need and weakness had at last broken down her pride, and taught her, ‘as a little child,’ to *receive* where hitherto she had only reasoned. Once more, through the darkness, God had spoken, ‘Let there be light, and there was light.’

The Christmas morning service was very sweet to Nellie that year; the echo of the angels’ song; the reminder of Him who, as on this day, stooped to our mortal flesh. The sunshine of Christmas hope found its way even through her sorrow; and there was a steadfast look on her face, when she turned from the holy table, as if she had offered there that costly sacrifice of her own will, which is only possible to those who lay it at the feet of Him who once wore the crown of thorns, and in whose hands is ‘the print of the nails.’

And yet, the day was sad both for the mother and daughter. For the thoughts of each were on a name which one of them dared not speak. Mrs Grahame, indeed, talked of her boy, and of the broken heart she

must carry to the grave, and seemed to find great solace in so doing ; but Nellie could not answer her. She was glad when a friend came in to tea, and she could leave the two old ladies to entertain each other, and steal away to be alone with her new hope, and her new sorrow. However, she was not permitted long solitude. There came a knock and ring at the door, which made her start and flush. And yet she had expected it.

But, just as she was preparing to go down, a sudden remembrance almost stopped the heart-beats which were bounding so fast. One word thrilled through her brain, and made it dizzy,—‘Divided.’

She sat down for a moment to think. Was there another loss before her, sorer even than the loss of Charlie ? Must this shining of heavenly light fall as an impassable barrier between her and one who saw it not ? She could not face the question yet. She put it away from her, for to-night at least.

‘Willie !’ they were second cousins—the familiar names were learned in babyhood, ‘How did you manage to get here to-night ?’

‘It wasn’t easy ; I slipped out and told nobody.’ There was a look which said he would have done a great deal more for her sake. •

‘Oh, you have come down, Nellie,’ said Mrs Grahame ; ‘I told Willie I thought you had a headache.’

‘You would not have said that to Frank Hathaway,’ thought Nellie ; but she did what she knew she was ex-

pected to do, sat down beside old Mrs Reynolds, and heard complaints about her servants, and murmurings about her daughters-in-law ;—while her mother inflicted much the same strain on another listener. He looked vexed, she could see. He had not given up the pleasant home party for this. And Nellie's own heart pleaded hard on the other side. The 'dividing' might not come, without pain that would not soon sleep.

But cousin Willie was not easily baulked of his purpose. He went back to an old ruse, and asked for music.

'Ah, we are in no mood for it,' said Mrs Grahame ;
'poor Charlie!'

But the piano was open, and some irresistible impulse drew Nellie's fingers to the keys. She would not sing, but her cousin did not urge her ; he would rather her lips were left free, for Mrs Grahame's attention was claimed, and her ears were a little dull.

'I have some news for you, Nellie.'

'Is it good ? It ought to be, to-night.'

'It's both good and bad. I've got an appointment—that is good. But it's abroad, and I must go at once. That was one reason I came to-day. I may not see you again.'

The playing went on mechanically. 'For how long.'

'Only three years. It's a capital thing. It will put me in a different position when I return. Are you glad, Nellie?'

He did not himself know whether he wished her to be glad or sorry ; and, for her, a mingling of emotions made reply difficult. But he was going ! So much she was sure of, and the firmly shut lips grew white.

‘Nellie !’ Mrs Grahame broke in on the dialogue, ‘I wish you would sing that Christmas hymn I like so much.’

It would be hard work, but she must do it. And the sweet words calmed her as she sung them, for they told of the God-man who had suffered.

‘Sing something more lively, won’t you ? That dismal thing does not suit your voice.’

‘It is not dismal, Willie.’ She could speak now, for a silent cry for strength had made the words possible. ‘It takes one to the true joy of Christmas—the Saviour, born to die.’ He looked at her, half keenly, half amused.

‘It’s new to hear you speak so.’

‘Because I have only just begun to think so.’

And before Nellie went to sleep, a whisper in her heart told her that the ‘goodbye,’ so quietly said, was for more than three years.





CHAPTER XVI.

LINKS TIED AND BROKEN.

PERHAPS my readers think my story very commonplace. So it may be, but I cannot write it other than it is. If they are tired, let them lay it down.

But every life has its thread of gold, running sometimes out of sight, but still running on to the end, and then lost in darkness, or in light. And it is worth while to trace this thread—to watch its brightening or its tarnishing. So I have tried to retain some glimpses of it, as it has gleamed out in lives I know, and love to watch.

It is two years since the date of my last chapter—no small space in any life, and long enough to bring change in most. But, for the Hope party, they had passed very quietly, leaving the home treasures untouched, and only bringing one added gift—baby Edith, Winnie's god-child and special pet.

Winnie herself is where she was, in point of health,—still on her couch, though able, as Mr Norris had prophesied, to move about her own and the drawing-room, and occasionally to bear a drive. And she had not ‘grown accustomed to it,’ as invalids are supposed to do. The old longing was often strong upon her, for the freedom of her girlish days; and the battle with constant pain, seemed no whit less easy to fight. But she had learned so to fight it, that none, unless perhaps Lilies, dreamed of the conflict. They only saw the victory, given her by Him on whom she daily leaned.

And the quiet life was by no means an idle one. Winnie’s sofa had gradually become the centre of a wide circle; and her desk, she sometimes said, was her ‘mission station.’ Through pen and pencil she comforted many sorrowful hearts, and stimulated many weary ones. ‘Winnie Hope’s letters’ were treasured as Winnie little knew. There might not be much wisdom in them, but there was always sympathy. ‘Why is it, Winnie,’ a friend said to her one day, ‘that your letters seem to *fit* me like no one else’s? They bring me just the word I want.’

Winnie smiled. She thought she knew the reason. She had learned to believe that for her to-day, as for the Corinthians of old, the word was true,—‘In everything ye are enriched in Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge.’ And so, for words and thoughts, she came helplessly to Him who could teach her both.

Winnie did not dislike solitude now. She had grown

strong enough to bear it ; and moreover, each moment brought its work, unless on days, of which there were too many, when all occupation was impossible. It was hard to feel that even these hours of helpless endurance had their place in the service her heavenly Master appointed ; but she loved to remember that so it was. He chose them for her, and He never left her to bear them alone.

But she did not spend many of her hours in quiet. The mornings, indeed, she tried to keep as far as possible free from outside interruption ; but the afternoons were given up to any claims that might arise, and they were varied enough. But if, at the end of the day, she lay back, voiceless and weary, it was something if, for the many busy ones around her, she could be the one spot of rest, where they could lay down their burden for a moment, and take it again, strengthened. *She* might get tired with the burdens meanwhile, but that did not matter.

One of her frequent visitors was Mary Harper, grown into young ladyhood now, a colourless-looking girl, with a good deal of the spring of life crushed out of her by 'eldest-of-the family' cares. Lying alone, one April day, when Mrs Hope and Lilius were out for a drive, Winnie heard her step on the stairs.

'Come in ; I know who it is,' she said, in answer to the gentle tap.

'Alone ! Oh how delightful ! And are you tired ? Have you had heaps of people ?'

'Not "heaps" exactly, and I am not too tired for you. Take off your hat, and sit down. Somebody is tired, I know.'

Mary drew a long breath. 'I *am* tired. It would be nice to feel rested, once in a while—to go,—Oh I wish I could, just for one week, where nobody would ever call "Mary."'

'You shall come down to us at Alveston.'

Mary's eyes brightened for a moment, but she shook her head. 'Mamma could not spare me.'

'How is she to-day?'

'Not so well.' The girl's lips quivered. She crouched down by Winnie's sofa, and hid her face on her shoulder. Winnie did not try to give her any comfort, beyond that of love and silence. She let her cry till she was quiet.

'I'm not anxious about her,' said Mary at last; 'I know there is no need. Only—I'm foolish, I think—and there are so many things always going wrong. And yet, they are only little things. If it was something really hard! I don't think the discipline of small troubles is very ennobling. Great ones would call out a kind of antagonistic greatness—strength that would be braced by the very need for it. Small ones makes one all the more impatient, because they are not worth minding.'

'Ah, but I don't think that is the secret of our impatience, Mary. Don't we make these tiny troubles harder to bear, by trying not to feel them? And do we

not need the help of our dear Lord as much, for the crosses which no one can see but ourselves, as for those we wear outside, and get sympathy for? We put the thought of Him away from our everyday worries and self-denials, and perhaps that is the reason the worries ruffle us so much, and the self-denials are so grudging.'

'And then there are the boys,'—Mary remarked after a while, and Winnie knew well what a world lay in that sentence.

'How is Phil going on?'

She shook her head. 'I see now what an evil it has been that we have had little *home* life. Papa has been so much in public, and mamma and I so busy with the younger children, that there have been no *evenings* for the older ones. It's no wonder they like being out. But oh, I wonder sometimes how it is, when one longs and prays for them, that God does not answer.'

'Here is Miss May,' said Winnie, as she heard a knock at the door, 'let us ask her about it.'

Mary was rather vexed. 'I can never get you by yourself!' But she could not be very sorry to see Miss May. The old lady always brought her own welcome.

She, indeed, had changed in these two years' space. Her health had failed a good deal, but the difference was not physical so much as mental. It was as if some look-out into a far eternity had widened both heart and mind. And with the widening came a softening. Her whole being was touched with a new grace of tenderness.

which showed itself in look, and tone, and word, even through the careless interchange of ordinary talk.

‘Ah,—you here, Mary,’—she said, as Mary placed her a chair and a footstool; ‘you were having a chat, you two, and you don’t want me. Well, I will go away as soon as I’ve got my breath.’

‘Don’t, Miss May,’ said Winnie,—‘we *were* having a chat, but we had come to a knot in it.’

‘Perhaps I cannot untie it.’

‘I don’t think you can, but you can tell us some of your thoughts.’ And Winnie stated the difficulty.

‘Ah, my child,’ said the old lady, ‘that’s beyond my explaining. One may ask the Good Shepherd to guide the wandering ones to His own fold of rest, but we must leave the how and the when to Him. And it is difficult to trust Him about it. One is tempted to wonder why He seems to lose so much time,—why He lets them wander, their hearts crying out for Him, although they don’t know the meaning of the cry. It seems strange that He does not answer it—that they do not hear at once the word which would lead them where they might walk with Him in the light of His peace. But He has not forgotten them. Only, His love is wiser than ours—wise enough, and strong enough to wait.’

Much happy talk followed after this. Miss May and Winnie at least talked, and Mary listened, laying up many bits of strength for her daily struggle.

And then Winnie was once more alone. She always

enjoyed the selittle spaces between one visitor and another. She liked to lie still, and quietly lay before the One Helper, the need or care she might have heard from one who had left, and to ask for herself the right word to be spoken to one who might come.

But there were no more arrivals that afternoon. She heard Mrs Hope and Liliias come back from their drive—the former going at once, as was her custom, to the nursery; and Lily, why, how strange! Lily actually passed the drawing-room door, and went up to her own room!

Winnie wondered exceedingly. It was a little thing to wonder at, some would think; but for these two sisters, whose lives were one, it was more than many could guess. And again came the wish, 'Oh, if I could go to her!' Lying still was easy enough in the abstract, but some particular instances of it never lost their trial.

By-and-by—not soon, however—Lily came down.

'I could not think what had become of you. Didn't you come in a long while ago?'

'Was it long? Oh yes,' glancing at the time-piece, 'longer than I thought.'

'Come here, Lily. What is the matter with your face?'

'My face!'

'Yes; there is something in it.' Lily came and knelt by the sofa, but she did not seem disposed to let her face be seen; she kept it behind, among the cushions.

'Lily'—Winnie's heart was beating fast, though her voice was quiet—'you have something to tell me.'

No answer. 'If you won't speak, I shall have to tell *you*.'

'I got a letter by the afternoon post,'—

'Yes, I know. It was from Arthur Ware. Lily, I am so glad.'

'But how could you possible guess?'—and a little bit of crimson showed from the cushions.

'Oh, I have known a long time.'

'He never told you!'

'Certainly not; but something did—instinct, or intuition, or whatever you like to call it.'

'There's papa,' said Lily, starting up as she heard his step outside. 'There was a letter for him too.'

'Ah!' said the doctor, coming in and throwing himself into a chair,—'what's to be done about this business? Come here and tell me. What am I to say to this young man?'

'Papa,' said Lily, as he drew her into his arms, 'may I answer the letter myself?'

He laughed, his rare, hearty laugh. It did not augur ill for Lily's request. 'Well, I don't know; I'll see about it. But Lily,' he added, gravely then, while his hand rested softly on her bowed head, as she knelt—'if you must leave us—and I suppose you must some day—I could not give you to any one so gladly, with such perfect trust. You have God's blessing, and mine.'

Lily stayed for no more. And Winnie knew that, even if she could, she might not follow her. Already the parting had come.

Her father watched her for a moment. Then he crossed the room to her sofa, and bent down to kiss her. She understood what the kiss meant, even without the murmured words,—‘My brave patient lassie!’

‘But I’m not brave, and I’m not patient,’ she said, the next day, to Miss May, with whom all the family news was shared, and who whispered the same words, as she took Winnie’s face between her two hands, and looked into it.

‘Ah well, my dear, I do not suppose the soldier feels brave, when he is in the thick of a hand-to-hand fight. He does not feel much of anything, not even his wounds. And perhaps he doesn’t feel brave, even when he is out of it—only weak, and very tired. But the thing is, that he has won the battle.’

‘But I’m not winning.’

‘Nonsense, child—you know nothing about it. There are some victories that seem like failures.’

‘Miss May,’ said Winnie suddenly, ‘don’t you ever feel lonely?’

‘Not now. I’ve got over that stage long ago. I remember it well though—those years from thirty to forty, that are always trying—when the spring sheen is past, and the autumn glow has not come. Yes, it isn’t comfortable—one is neither a girl nor an old woman,

and debateable land isn't pleasant to occupy. But you get through, and you find how full of beauty and blessing a single life may be, and you learn to accept it,—Oh, with such full content, Winnie!—and the beaming, sunny smile, bringing back her lost youth, was the best comment on her words.

Late that same evening—so late, indeed, that none but Dr Hope was up in the house—there came an urgent message from Mrs Stretton. He was to go at once, her baby was dying;—and would Mrs Hope go with him?

The two families had not seen much of one another since the summer at Alveston. Mrs Hope often wondered if those two talks had been remembered. It was hardly possible, she thought, in the whirl in which Mrs Stretton constantly lived,—a whirl which seemed to drift her further and further from all that is noblest in woman and wife. And when they had occasionally met, she fancied that the young creature shrank from her, as if she dreaded to be reminded of what she would rather forget. So the little intercourse they had was constrained on both sides.

Mrs Hope was somewhat surprised, therefore, when her husband woke her from her first light sleep, by announcing the message he had received. 'Her baby!' She glanced at her own Edith—'O yes, I'll go.'

For one moment she knelt by the little bed, to ask wisdom to strengthen, balm to comfort; and then, with

small delay, she was beside him in the carriage, which had been sent.

The house was full of lights as they drove up to it. All the lower rooms had been evidently thrown open for a large entertainment—magnificent apartments they were, and full of all the beauty which wealth and taste could gather. But they were deserted and silent now. The sorrow of the house was not there.

Up in a little nursery, too far away, Mrs Hope thought, for the mother to be very often in it, they found the sick child. Mrs Stretton was there—a shawl thrown hastily over her evening dress—the flowers in her hair contrasting strangely with her wild haggard face. She was sitting in a low chair, the baby laid across her lap, her husband standing behind, and trying in vain to calm her.

‘My baby—Oh, my baby!’—she rose and laid it in his arms—‘O! tell me, tell me it will live.’

The doctor looked at it in silence. One glance was enough to show him the truth; but how could he tell it to the poor mother! He turned to the nurse, a young pretty looking girl, hardly more than a child herself.

‘This isn’t your head nurse?’ he asked.

‘No, she is gone for her holiday. Oh why did I let her?’

‘And you left this girl in charge of your baby?’ The doctor felt as if, with that little creature in his arms, he could have gone forth with the doom of the old

prophet: 'Woe to the women that are at ease.' But another glance quieted him. It was no time for anger in that presence.

'Did the baby cry much?' he said, turning again to the girl—'don't be frightened—speak out, and tell me the truth.'

'Yes.'

'And you wanted to go down stairs and see what was going on?'

'Yes.'

'Well, and you gave the baby something to make it sleep?'

'Yes,' again—but very low this time.

'Show me the bottle. "Soothing Syrup."—Ah, I thought so—an over dose.'

He put the infant back into its mother's hold.

'But you can save it,' she shrieked—'it won't die—not die?'

He did not speak, but his silence told all.

'She shall go—this moment she shall go to the police station,' said Mr Stretton, laying his hand on the girl's shoulder.

'Hush,' said Dr Hope, authoritatively, as he pointed to the meek pure face—and so they stood and watched the little life ebbing away. Even the mother was still—her grief kept back,

'While on the heart so near to breaking
Lay the heart so near to rest.'

One gasping sob—one struggle of the tiny hands, and all was over.

It was a terrible night which followed for the poor mother. Mrs Hope watched by her through it, but it was little she could do.

‘Oh, my baby, my baby—my baby that I have killed!’ Through all the long slow hours this was her one passionate wail. In vain her husband tried to comfort her. It was touching to see him, a grave, grey-haired man, bending over her as she lay.

‘No, Charlotte, no—it was not your fault—you couldn’t foresee. It was that girl; but she shall be punished.’ His lips were set as he spoke, and his voice stern.

‘No’—she almost shrieked—raising herself from the couch to grasp his arm—‘punish *me*—I killed him, my own, own baby. Who should have cared for him, if his mother did not? Promise me you won’t do anything?’

‘My dear, do lie down and calm yourself. I won’t do anything without your approbation. There—there,’ he added, laying her back, and patting her, as if she had been a child—‘lie down, and try to sleep. Will you, may I ask you to stay with her?’ he added, turning to Mrs Hope.

‘Yes, surely,’ was the answer. ‘I shall be only too thankful to be of the least use.’

Of all the troops of gay friends who, but two hours since, had filled the rooms below, there was not one to

whom they could turn in their trouble. The first thought, then, was of one little cared for in brighter days.

‘Where are the rest?’ said Mrs Stretton, starting up again after her husband had left her, just when Mrs Hope fancied that at last she was falling asleep. ‘I must go and see if they are safe—come with me.’

It was vain to dissuade—so they went together to the room where the other children slept,—two boys of seven and eight, and two younger girls. Very lovely they looked, fair enough to justify some pride of ownership in any mother, as they lay in soft happy slumber, pictures of childish beauty. She knelt long by each little crib; but to her the innocent faces were only full of reproach.

‘They hardly know their mother,’ she said, ‘and I’m not fit to come near them now!’ and the old cry came back—‘my baby—my baby!’

‘Listen!’ said Mrs Hope, as she knelt down with her beside the little sleepers—‘the past is too sad for you to look at, and yet I do believe that, through its very darkness, God is bringing you His own light.’

She shook her head. ‘Not for me! Do you remember saying to me once that, “I don’t care” had been the ruin of many a woman? It has been mine. And now it’s too late.’

‘Never, while there is love and pardon. Never, while He says, “Come unto Me.” Let us go to Him now.’

And, taking the cold hand in hers, she prayed, in few simple words, to ‘Him who hearethn.’

‘Now,’ she said gently, when they rose, ‘you will come to bed.’

She was too worn out to resist, and suffered herself to be undressed and laid down. ‘But you won’t leave me,’ she implored, when at length her eyes were closing from very weariness:—

‘No—I shall stay on the sofa, near you;’ for if she slept, Mrs Hope well knew how sad the waking must be. And, when the quiet breathing told her that exhaustion and grief were for a while forgotten, her heart went up to God in one cry of intensest yearning for the young creature to whom He had so strangely drawn her, that through this purifying of the fiery furnace, she might be made a vessel meet for Him.

After this night, until they went out for the summer to Alveston, Mrs Hope was much with Mrs Stretton. She shut herself up from all her former acquaintances, but she craved for the constant presence of her one comforter. Not that her new friend’s consoling was without its faithfulness. She did not help her to any self-excusing for the past, or try in the least to hide from her its wrong and blame. But she pointed her to the One Sacrifice for sin—the One Friend of sinners. She spoke of the bringing in of a better hope, and the working out of a spotless righteousness.

‘Spotless’—she caught at the word—‘but not for me.’

‘Yes, for you—for all—the righteousness which Christ

has wrought by His perfect life—by His atoning death ;
—His free gift.’

‘But I am not worthy!’

‘He knows that ; but His question to you is not, “Are you worthy?” but, “Are you willing?” He came not to call the righteous—He came to seek the lost. His love meets us when there is no hope.’

‘It’s easy for you to talk,’ was the mournful answer—
‘*you* may be sure of it.’

‘I *am* sure of it—but *just* because His love is all my trust—just because I look up to the cross, where He died, and I know that He gave himself for me. And if you look there too, you will have the same confidence. It is not a question of you or me, but of Him.’

‘But would not it be presumption in me to hope?’

‘Do you know that it is rather presumption to doubt? You would believe my word, would you not?’

‘Yes’—and she looked with a smile into the true eyes which met hers. ‘I don’t believe in many people, the world is so hollow and heartless, but I could not doubt you.’

‘Then, will you not let the poor weak human love lead you up higher? “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.” Take Him at His word—not as you take me, surely not—for He is the Truth.’

Many such talks they had, during those fair spring days which followed the baby’s death. Again and again the same ground was to be gone over—the same battle

to be fought, with despondency and despair. But gradually, just as the life of the outer world woke up from its winter sleep, so this human soul, long literally 'dead in pleasure,' awoke to its true life in God. The little child, whom Jesus called, was the mother's link to heaven.

Her link also, to a life on earth more worthy of the name.

'May I hope, as I look forward?' she said one evening to her friend. It was their last talk before the Hopes left for Alveston. 'I hardly dare, and yet—'

'Surely He who pardons the past gives us the future. The love which rebukes will, in part, repair and restore; and if He seeks the lost, will He not also raise the fallen?'

'But when your lot is shaped, and you can't change it—when you only struggle, and struggle, and feel you are beating your heart out against what must be—'

'Ah! I know how hard it is! But take the "must be" from Him who loves you.'

'How can I, when I made it for myself? God gave me a life that might have been, oh, so different, and I have spoiled it.'

It was the old question over again, not hopeless as ever, but nearly as bitter. She was crouching on a stool at her friend's feet, her slight girlish figure trembling in every limb.

'Put it into His hand, dear, and take it back *from*

Him. Only "the Lord is my shepherd" answers all that questioning;—quiets one's heart, even when the future seems nothing but a cloudy sea and a rocky shore.'

'I don't think it quiets mine. I suppose the promise, "All things work together for good to them that love God," only belongs to those whose will is so merged in God's, that His "good" and theirs are one; and I have not got so far yet.'

'The *joy* of the promise,' said Mrs Hope, smiling—'not the promise itself, for that is true always. But the joy of it is only when we are willing to have God do with us just what He pleases; and often our heart dies within us before that is reached. But the rest afterwards, is like what comes to a stormy sea, when cross winds are stilled, when it lies quiet in the sunshine again, and looks up to the blue.'

'From Him!' She pondered the words that evening, as she waited for her husband's return from town. Would it ever be possible to meet him as a wife should—a wife, not in name, but in love? With that remembrance she would try.

It was a pretty room in which she sat,—a place to live in, with no discords of colour; for, in different shades and substances, always mellow and retiring, but never broken, every article in it repeated and varied only two,—amber and crimson. On the walls were a few pictures, mild, sweet water-colours, of the old style, yet not deficient in tint—true enough to the nature of

Derwentwater or Ullswater, under certain conditions; and to lanes and wider landscapes, when the touch of the 'fiery finger' had faded into sober browns and russets. The whole house, which had been inhabited by successive generations of Strettons, had a quaint atmosphere about it, with which its master harmonised much better than his wife.

And there was the carriage. Mrs Stretton hesitated a moment whether she should go and meet him; but she had never done such a thing since their marriage, and she could not begin with that. It was something new, indeed, that she should be in the drawing-room to receive him; still more, that she should look up as he entered, and give him a smile. For *him*, they had always been rare, however they might rain on others; and though he had not greatly troubled himself about their absence, it was pleasant to see one now.

'Well, my dear,—been out to-day?'

'Yes—I went a drive with the children.'

'That's right.'

She came and hovered about his chair, but anything like tenderness was so strange between them, that she did not know how to begin to show it. She saw, however, by some newly awakened instinct, that he looked absent and careworn, while his replies to her forced remarks during dinner were more than usually curt and pre-occupied. It was long before he joined her afterwards, and when he did, he was moody as ever.

‘Shall I read to you?’ she said, timidly, taking up a newspaper he had thrown down.

‘What?’ The offer amazed him so much that he could not realise it.

‘Would you like;—if your eyes are tired, mine shall do duty instead?’

‘No, thank you. There’s no news I care about.’

He leaned his head on his hand, and seemed lost in reflection. Then he took out his memorandum-book, and began to study figures and papers. It was very tiresome, his wife thought. How could she endure many such evenings? If they were to be thrown on one another, without a whirl of company between, how were flesh and blood to bear it?

‘What are you thinking about?’ he asked abruptly, catching the sigh which came with her thoughts. She started and blushed, as she had *not* blushed, when he asked what she thought of *him*.

‘Well, never mind,’ he added sadly. ‘I don’t know why you should tell me: I have something to tell you.’

‘What?’

‘What you won’t like to hear.’

‘Something that troubles you,’ she said, coming, on a sudden impulse to kneel beside him—‘let me know it, will you not?’

‘You must know it.’ He turned away from her with a half groan.

‘Let me know it.’ The little hand was laid plead-

ingly on his, for her heart smote her that she had never sought to know his troubles before.

‘Listen then. You know nothing about business matters, but you can understand what failure means.

‘Has it come?’

‘Not quite, but I think it must.’

She glanced round the room, and his eyes followed hers.

‘Yes, we must leave it all. It’s hard for you and the children—it does not matter much for me.’

‘It matters most for you, I think, William,’ she almost started, herself, as the name passed her lips. And so it was—to begin life over again, with grey hairs.

‘But there’s my money—’

‘Gone, too—Oh, Charlotte!’ He hid his face as if he could not bear to look at her.

‘How?’ she asked, after a while. ‘I thought people could not fail unless they were in business.’

‘Speculation,’ he answered briefly. ‘I never made a bad one till now.’

‘And what of old Aunt Sophia’s legacy?’

‘That’s safe—settled on you and the children. And it’s about £200 a year.’

‘And many people would think themselves rich with that!’

He gazed at her earnestly. ‘I thought you would have been quite crushed. She is braver than I fancied, my little wife.’

‘Ah, you don’t know how brave I can be,’ she replied, with a smile, that came readily this time, for those three words seemed to open out a future, not yet of love perhaps, but at least of hope. ‘We might have been left penniless, and now we shall certainly be above want, besides your profession.’

‘Ah, I meant to retire this year, and now I must go grinding on.’

It was hard for him, very hard ; and yet his wife felt almost thankful for the blow which, in a sense, had struck them together—made it at least possible that their lives might touch each other, instead of running for ever apart. She drew him on to speak of the future of the children, and of the home that must be found somewhere.

‘It will be a quiet life, Charlotte—no parties or balls. How will you like it ?

‘I shall learn,’ she said, brightly.

‘And your friends ?’

‘I have none—I’ve made that discovery lately—except Mrs Hope, and she will not forsake us because we are poor.’

‘I should not have thought her much to your taste.’

‘She wouldn’t have been once—but now ;—William,’ she added, while the blood flushed in a crimson tide over her face—‘there are riches that cannot be taken from us.’

A rather sardonic smile answered her. ‘That’s what

your new friend has taught you, is it? Well, after all,' he added, softening, 'if it's these new ideas that have helped you to bear up so bravely, there may be more in them than I thought.'

She tried to say more, but the words would not come. Only in her heart she prayed—and perhaps the prayer was better than the speaking.





CHAPTER XVII.

ONE AT REST.

MARY HARPER did go to Alveston, notwithstanding her protest that she could not be spared from home. Dr Hope settled that, by ordering her away; declaring it to be imperatively necessary that she should have rest and change, two things which, in all her life, she had scarcely known. It was touching to see her delight in country sights, and sounds, and odours, all sweet to her. And then the pleasure of being with Winnie was very great; while to her she was just at this time a special comfort, helping a little to beguile the desolate feeling which would creep over her, in spite of all her efforts, when Arthur and Liliás started for a walk, and Mrs Hope was occupied with Edith, and she alone was left, with none to love her best. Liliás strove to be considerate, and thought herself a model for any 'engaged young lady;' but her happiness was so absorbing,

that the possible pain of others could hardly reach her through it. So Mary did good service, and herself gathered nerve and strength daily, during her month at the Hollies.

It was the last Sabbath before the time fixed for her return, and both she and Winnie were looking on with a little dread to their parting. Winnie had just dismissed her class of girls ; for both this and the preceding summer she had gathered a few of the farmers' daughters, who considered themselves above the Sunday school, for a little Bible reading in the afternoons. And now, when they were gone, she was full, as usual, of misgivings.

'I wish I knew how to teach or touch them ! If I could only reach their hearts somehow ? First, with them, the want, the hunger, must be awakened ; in our rank it arises only too soon. But they seem to need nothing. And now, I feel as if I had only made them hate the Bible ; they looked so tired of it, I do not believe they will ever come again !'

'Nonsense !' said Mary, 'your own feeling about it proves nothing, especially when you are tired. And I remember, when I once said something like that to Miss May, she told me it was a mistake to take up one's work, and do it over again in one's own mind. Of course, you think you do it a great deal better, and you look at the blunders you have made, till you could break your heart over them ; but Miss May said we should learn to lay

the burden of a finished work at Christ's feet, as well as of that not yet begun.'

'Perhaps,' said Winnie, smiling, 'and if there has been failure, He upbraideth not ; I like that word in Hebrews ; "Who can have compassion on the ignorant."'

'I wish my work was like yours, Winnie ; I never can do anything worth doing ; the days are so full of interruptions.'

'It is very trying, Mary ; I am afraid I should get dreadfully impatient. I do, over my own interruptions, though they come in a different shape ; —being able to go on with a thing,—for instance, this class,—a few weeks, and then being stopped by an illness. One's life seems made up of beginnings and endings. But what if, after all, we have no work to do on our own account ; if *our* work is just to do *His* ? Then it can be nothing to us if He bids us do this rather than that.'

'Yes ; if one could remember ?'

'I suppose,' said Winnie softly, 'the great help would be, so to live in the power of this entire oneness with Christ, that it would be impossible to forget.'

'Ah, if you are sure you have been made one with Him ! But I never know when or how, and people talk of the way and the time.'

'But, Mary, do any two wandering sheep come back the same way to the fold ? And can many of us draw lines in our lives, and say, "Beyond that, was darkness ; here, light begins ?" I think not, though it may be so

with some. Only we know that the light is there. It may be only the grey dawn, but you cannot mistake it for midnight. And dawn grows—it does not fade.’

Just at this point the two girls were astonished at seeing a carriage drive to the door.

‘Dr Henderson! what in the world can have sent him to-day!’ exclaimed Winnie.

‘I did not come to see *you*,’ said the doctor smiling, as he entered the drawing-room; ‘where is Mrs Hope?’

‘I do not know; I think she went to see an old woman in the village. Oh no, she is there, just coming in at the gate.’ The doctor stepped through the low window on to the lawn, and went hurriedly to meet her.

‘Can you come with me to the Vicarage? I have been there all night.’

‘Was her mother there in time? She was to have come yesterday.’

‘No; but I believe she will be here to-day. I wish she was, for I have not overmuch confidence in that nurse; there is something about her I do not like; and *she* is a fragile little thing. I told Thornton to send off at once for Dr I——. I must have a second opinion.’

‘Could I be of any use?’

‘Of course you might. She is not fit to be left to hired hands. I came to see if you would go back with me.’

So, an hour afterwards, Mrs Hope was installed in Mrs Thornton’s room, with a strict injunction from the

doctor, that the patient was to sleep and not talk ; which she did for some time, while her friend watched her, with many thoughts which, in spite of herself, ran in a sad current. She looked so young and childish, lying there, her bright hair tossed back on the pillow, and one cheek resting on her hand. The little mouth was troubled sometimes, and now and then she started restlessly. Once Mrs Hope caught a murmur,—

‘Oh, Edward, have patience!’

It seemed sacrilege to hear more, and the watcher was glad when she woke.

‘Where is—?’

Her eyes wandered wistfully round the room.

‘Mr Thornton?’

‘Yes. May not he come to me? Dr Henderson said he might when I had been asleep.’

Mrs Hope went to his study, and found him looking pale and anxious. His eager look at her face showed her that his heart was true to his child-wife. She told him to go upstairs, and went herself to the nursery. Baby, a fine stout boy, was asleep, placidly unconscious of the stir he had made.

‘He will not have her long,’ said nurse, shaking her head oracularly.

‘Nonsense, nurse,’ said Mrs Hope, sharply ; ‘what makes you think there is anything wrong?’

‘Things isn’t generally right, that I can see,’ snapped nurse ; ‘the doctor said he would like another opinion,

but it's my belief opinions are not much good. I never heard they cured any body.'

'It is well they do not kill any body ; but if you are doubtful about Mrs Thornton, you had better look extra well after her.' A practical application which the good woman seemed by no means to relish so well as her own speculative venture about 'opinions.'

Some hours after, Mrs Hope was sitting by the young mother's side, with baby on her knee, when she startled her by saying, 'Do you remember a talk we had one evening ? It seems a long time ago now !'

Mrs Hope remembered it clearly enough ; but, while she was hesitating how to reply, Mrs Thornton went on.

'I feel as if I had grown so old since then ; but, that is not what I meant to say. You remember, you spoke about a Voice we might always hear ? I have thought of that so often since, when I have been lonely, or—or, troubled about anything. And I know it now !'

'My sheep hear My voice,' said her friend, softly.

'Yes ; and He has given His life for the sheep ; and they shall never perish, not even the weakest ; neither shall any pluck them out of His hand. It makes one feel so safe to think of that !'

Her eyes closed again wearily. But even after she had fallen asleep, she smiled a happy smile.

Early the following day her mother arrived, and Mrs Hope gave up her post with great willingness. A restless, bustling sort of body she seemed to be, with sharp

twinkling eyes, which were in all corners at once, no repose about her, and, Mrs Hope fancied, not much tenderness. The way she kissed her daughter, had a sort of business air, as if she felt it a thing to be *done*. And before she had been in the house ten minutes, every room seemed full of her.

The post, that same Monday, brought tidings of Claude. She had been engaged for some time, and now at last she was married—'well'—as the world would say, for her husband had a splendid establishment, and a rent-roll of £5000 a year. So the world concluded further that she was very happy—how could she be otherwise.

But would Claude ever remember, that, once upon a time, when a true heart was laid at her feet ;—yes,—it *was* true then,—she passed on with a careless, 'Thank you—not to-day?'

Strangely—how strangely, is the web of life woven ! Sad news came from the Vicarage next morning. For just as darkness melted into dawn, that strange hour when the forces of life and death seem so often to meet in mysterious conflict, Alice Thornton passed away from arms that would fain have held her, from hearts that yearned after her, almost to breaking. The young life had been broken off in its opening sunshine ; broken, yet not lost ; for 'My sheep shall never perish.' They were

almost the last words she spoke,—not her own, but His, who had called her now to His own quiet fold, where they who enter shall no more go out. For her, surely, it was well. She was too tender, too clinging, to battle with the storms of life. Better that she was safe beyond them all, in the shadow of God's everlasting peace.

Nellie Grahame was also a frequent visitor at the Hollies during that summer ; for, towards the end of the winter preceding, she had been left almost literally alone in the world. Her mother died after a brief illness, and she had no near relative remaining, except Charlie, from whom she seldom heard. She felt her loss keenly. She and Mrs Grahame had been more to one another during these last two years ; and it was very touching to see their clinging together, even through some trial of patience on Nellie's part, and much unconscious provocation on her mother's. All forgotten now ! The love, which life sometimes tried, death made for ever sacred.

Nellie determined to leave her old home, and seek apartments elsewhere. It was only a 'house' now, since the love which made it more had passed out of sight. And though many say it is sad, when change follows upon death, it seems to me (as an old friend of mine remarks, I think, in some story), that there is no change so bitter as where all remains the same, except —.

So, after a few visits elsewhere, Nellie came to the Hollies, to wait till her plans were settled. She could

not yet decide upon anything for the future. The small income which she inherited from her mother was enough for her actual wants, and her music and songs might have considerably added to it; but Mr Macdonald had lately expressed himself not quite satisfied with the character of the latter, and warned Nellie that the public taste would not accept them: 'they were too serious.'

'Why do you not write as you did at first?' he inquired, in one of his notes to her.

'Because I cannot,' was Nellie's answer; 'because I am not what I was then.' To which he replied, by regrets, that she seemed to have taken up 'extreme opinions.' Nellie smiled, as she showed the letter to Mrs Hope.

'You have no difficulties now, Nellie; about doing this, and not doing that?'

'No, indeed,' said Nellie, with kindling eyes; 'but I see now how wise you were not to let me enter on these questions before I was ready for them. I think many good people talk too much to the young ones about *giving up*, before they know the love which is to make them willing.'

'Yes; but when one gets a glimpse of that, it is so easy! It is joy *then* to know that as He was in the world, so are we to be—outside of it—taking His place of rejection and dishonour. It seems hardly a cross to us to be there, when we are living in the strength of this entire oneness with our Lord.'

‘But still,’ said Nellie, ‘I think one learns these things very gradually. We know Christ as our Saviour—we *must* know Him thus before we recognise Him as our King and Lord—before we see that all we have is just to be used for Him. Lately, I have been thinking —.’ She stopped and hesitated.

‘What?’ said Lilies; who, while she played with little Edie, had been listening to their talk. But Nellie still did not speak. It seemed hard for her to find the words she wanted. She walked to the window, and looked out, while her listeners watched her. Winnie, indeed, was never tired of watching her. She had been pretty always—now she was something more, for the rare beauty was beginning to shine out in her face, which is higher than that of colour and form, the beauty of loving patience, of meek unselfish endurance. There are some features, moreover, which require the discipline of years to bring out their possibilities of loveliness.

‘Well, I have been thinking,’ she said at last, turning back again to the table, and taking up her work, ‘that as no one seems to need me now, I might go to the — Deaconess’ Institute.’

‘I do not know,’ said Mrs Hope, thoughtfully, ‘I believe God’s call to us women is not to *leave* our homes and serve, but to *stay* in them, and serve.’

‘But what if we have no homes? Of course we can work alone; but there is surely some strength in union and organisation;—and for those of us who do not even

know how to touch the misery and sin around us, it is better that our hands should be guided until they are trained. And I shall be glad of some definite work too; for, with me, I am afraid the indefinite would grow a little desultory; and if one may have the other —.'

'Yes, if one may,' thought Lili as to herself, carrying on mentally the broken thread of talk. 'I used to think I might, if I had not seen Arthur. And how I blamed mamma for turning me from what I thought was the higher life. But I suppose the highest for each of us is just what is chosen.'

Nellie, too, as she let her work fall upon her knee, and looked out down the village street, rested in that same remembrance—*what is chosen*. Not what she would have chosen—for she had clung to her choice blindly and wildly, till God showed her 'some better thing.' And then she let it go.

'It is so strange,' she said once to Winnie, the only person to whom she ever spoke of what might have been. 'It is just within my grasp now,—what I would once have almost given my life to gain; and I do not care to put out my hand and reach it; nay, I rather feel that I must put it back. He is changed since he came home.'

'Or are you changed?'

'Perhaps that is it. I cannot have the higher and the lower, and I must have the higher. He will seek it, too, one day; but we should not be together in the seeking now. So I must go on alone.'



CHAPTER XVIII.

PLEASANT PLACES.

WINNIE, down to breakfast!' exclaimed Mrs Ware. 'You should not do such things. I shall begin to be frightened at my responsibility in having you. Do, please, remember, that if you come to a crash I shall not be trusted with you again.'

'I am responsible for myself now,' said Winnie, laughing. 'You need not be afraid of my doing anything rash. I am too much in dread of the consequences.'

The sisters were in the breakfast-room of Alveston Hall. Winnie, not on the sofa, as of old, but in a low easy chair, with a baby girl of two years on her knee, and a boy, a year older, trying to clamber up behind, so as to nestle his brown curls in her neck. Lily pulled them both away.

'You need not have these little plagues at any rate.'

'Auntie likes us, said Artie, rather indignantly, while little Gertrude held up her mouth for a kiss.

'Yes, indeed, auntie does like you dearly'—and her lips touched the white brow—'but you may go to mamma now, for auntie will like you better when she's had her breakfast.'

'You shall have a cup of tea before prayers,' said Mrs Ware, ringing the bell, 'and do not, pray, let us have any more escapades of this kind,' she added, glancing at her sister's whitening face. 'Why did you do it, Winnie?'

'Because the power which one has not had is so pleasant to use, and because—because I want to be able to picture every bit of your day here, when I go home.'

'You are not going home yet—in fact, I do not exactly see why you should go at all.'

But Winnie shook her head.

'Why cannot you stay, Winnie? Arthur was speaking of it last night. He wishes it as much as I.'

'Papa would miss me; and, besides, all my work is there.'

'You can find work here,' said Lily, impatiently.

'Yes, I'm sure of that, if I were sent to find it; but perhaps not, if I turn away from what is put before me elsewhere.'

'But it is too much, what you are doing, Winnie, and I do not see the good of such constant activity. It wears one out to look at it.' Lily spoke rather discontentedly.

Her own life, since her marriage, had been so uncloudedly bright, that a little indolence had perhaps grown up in the sunshine.

'I wish I *were* constantly active,' said Winnie, laughing; 'but one has to give up so much time to one's body.'

Just then the prayer-bell rang. It was something new to her, and inexpressibly sweet, to join in the family morning service. Every step of return to the common life of others was marked with a heart-song of praise.

And yet she found, like many, that it is easier to be athorough invalid than a half-and-half one. The struggle between what must be done and what must be endured, was often full of weariness, and Winnie sometimes longed again for the immunities of her sofa, though her having been able to leave it was owing, in great measure, to her own determined and persevering efforts.

The post-bag came in with the coffee. Mr Ware gave his wife and Winnie their letters; but his newspaper lay unopened beside his plate, while he played with the children, to whom this hour of the day was always given up. Winnie glanced from Mary Harper's closely written chronicle of family grievances to watch the group—the sunshine out of other lives was enough to brighten her own, and that in Lily's was better than her own. It was such joy to see her in her fair peaceful home, 'a model wife, mother and squiress,' as her husband laughingly said. She was the same as in her unmarried

days—the same, with a difference ; for her quiet was not quite so still, and all the old shy reserve had disappeared. She was more of a girl now. Winnie thought that her two babies had taken her back into her teens.

‘Nellie is coming, Nellie Grahame—I wrote to ask her,’ Mrs Ware explained to Winnie. ‘She has been getting knocked up in that dreadful East End, and I thought our country quiet would do her good. She will be here this afternoon—what a pity, and the party to-night !’

‘She can come into the drawing-room afterwards with me,’ said Winnie—‘I am not going down, you know.’

‘Well, I suppose it would be too much for you. I am glad Nellie is coming.’

Mr Ware drank his coffee with a slight shrug. ‘She is a woman with theories and a mission. She will be full of Social Science and Blue Books. It took me a week to recover her last visit.’

‘He does not mean it, Winnie. He was quite interested in all her theories.’

‘I was interested in contradicting them.’

‘Ah, well, you must be allowed a little grumbling ; but you helped her, for all that.’

‘Of course. I believe in her work, though not in her theories. There, little woman,’ he added, as Gerty wriggled herself off his knee, ‘you have got no mission beyond simple *being*. I am not sure that it is not the highest.’

‘That is a theory,’ said Winnie, ‘very good for coffee and speculation ; but when you have had half an hour of the magistrate’s office at Carnford, you will find it untenable.’

‘Ah, and by the way, that reminds me (I cannot philosophise now, Winnie), that I may as well meet Miss Grahame at the station—what time is her train, Lily ?

‘Three o’clock.’

‘Yes that will do—I must be off.’

He bent over his wife’s chair, and kissed her—they had not laid aside their lover-like ways yet.

‘Lily,’ said Winnie, when, after husband and children were gone, they were left alone in the pretty breakfast-room, ‘might we have some reading now ?’

‘Yes, dear,’ said Lily absently, ‘only I must go first and see about things for to-night.’

But the ‘seeing about things’ lasted so long, that half the morning passed before it was over, and then the tinies had come in from their early walk, and were to be played with before they went to sleep ; and then there were letters to be written ; and Lily had so evidently forgotten the reading, that Winnie did not like to recur to it. And every day since she arrived it had been the same. Their talk always flowed in the same channels, borne on streams of sweetest home interest, but never borne away into wider horizons, mental or spiritual. Could it be that Lily was losing sight of them ? Was it inevitable, that this knitting of dearest ties must weave

about the soul so many subtile earth-bound links, that its upward soaring must be fettered?

A little sigh rose as she questioned thus. Lily caught it—and (for her consciousness seemed as quick as her hearing) interpreted it too.

‘Are you thinking I have grown very Martha-like, dear?’ she said, leaving her writing-table to kneel by Winnie’s side.

Winnie smiled. ‘I shall not dare to have any thoughts, if you guess them so.’

‘But you have not answered. Tell me! Nay, you need not, for I know it. Poor Martha! I used to think her so very exceedingly naughty when I was a girl, and I have such intense sympathy for her now. The “many things” seemed so much nearer than the “one thing.” It is easier for you than for me, Winnie, to remember the “warring without entanglement.” You know nothing about it. I did not before I was married.’

‘And yet, practically, nothing in that warefare is either easy or difficult. We have our Captain’s word,—“Without Me ye can do nothing;” and to Him, with Him, “all things are possible.” Is it not just because we say, “I can do this,” or “I cannot do that,” that there are so many failures?’

‘Ah, I remember,’ said Lily, meekly, ‘I *saw* that years ago, and held it fast for a time. But, Winnie, what of the servants, who have let the work grow dearer than the Master?’

‘This :—“He can have compassion—on them that are out of the way.”’ Lily smiled. She would say no more. The talk fell into silence, as it must, when depths are reached, where words only float on the surface.

Neither Nellie Grahame nor Winnie felt much at home in the drawing-room that evening.

‘I am out of the way of everything of this kind,’ said the former, as she wandered from one picture to another, while the rest were at dinner. ‘I have lived among my East End people, till I have fallen out of love with society.’

‘And I have been shut up till I am nearly as bad. But it is good for you, Nellie, to mix now and then with civilized human creatures.’

‘I am not sure of that. The civilizing makes them as uninteresting as so many marbles, all round and smooth alike.’

‘The marbles *are not* all round and smooth alike—only our sight is not fine enough to catch the differences.’

‘No—but one cannot analyse men and women microscopically, at least in the course of a drawing-room chat. Perhaps not much would come of the analysis, if one could.’

‘You have grown very cynical, Nellie. I am glad you came here—it was time.’

Nellie laughed. ‘There are a great many good books “about,”’ she said, changing the subject, as she

took one from the table ; ' I am half afraid they are too good for me. I have a very secular mind. I like something tangible in religious books,—holiness leavening daily life, and all the other fair regions of thought, where the soul seeks refreshment with the spirit. You would be amused at the miscellaneous literature on my table at home. I must have change of atmosphere mentally, if I cannot socially. One's mind wants freshening, and the bracing comes with it. But instead of "Sunday books" I read my Bible. One has all the good of them there, and none of the contradictions and shallowness—and the infinite depth and tenderness beside. Oh, Winnie, I wonder, sometimes, how we can be content with the broken echoes of God's voice, when we may listen to Himself. One needs to do that, when one comes to go down into such terrible depths of sin. Nothing else keeps one's soul from sickening.'

'What made you leave the Institute?'

'I have not,—I mean, I work under it still—I only do not live there. Minds and wills are diverse and perverse, are they not? Perhaps I am not quite the kind of material that can be cut after a prescribed pattern. Do you not think, by the way, that many people are too much afraid of their own nature—.'

She was interrupted by the return of the ladies from dinner. There were only five or six, for the party was small,—but one, a certain Mrs Temple, wife of the Vicar of C——, had caught Nellie's clear tones, as she uttered

this last speech, and, after a little time spent in general chat, she crossed the room to sit beside her.

Excuse me, Miss Grahame, I heard you saying something as I came in—something I did not understand.

‘Nor like,’—her face added, for the lady was a keen controversialist, with a wonderful instinct for heresy.

‘I did not finish,’ said Nellie smiling: ‘when I said that some people were too much afraid of their own nature—I did not mean, in so far as it is sinful, but in so far as it is human. Some sides of it—perhaps the imaginative, perhaps the intellectual—they try to keep in. They dare not let them grow. They would starve that part of themselves, that it may not develope. They would not keep the whole of their being open to free air and sunshine. They would rather there should not be any shoots out here or there. Hence one meets so many one-sided Christians.’

‘But, surely, growth in some directions must be repressed.’

‘Ah, but there is a difference between growth and over-growth—between growth trained and growth running wild. Because imagination may be in excess, there is no need to forget that it is a gift of God—a faculty of our being to which His Word addresses itself—capable of noblest service. Intellect, again, may mislead—.’

‘Ah,’ said Mrs Temple, ‘how many the pride of intellect leads astray!’

‘Exactly—the *pride*—but that is not one of God’s gifts.

'I am very much afraid of it all,' said Mrs Temple, rather inconsequently; 'I am glad there will be no logic in heaven.'

'I believe everything in heaven will be logical,' said a voice close by.

'Mr Thornton! I never heard you come in. How can you say such dreadful things! What do you mean?'

'Possibly not what *you* mean, my dear Mrs Temple,' said the Vicar, smiling. 'To me logic means order—to you, I believe, it means disorder.'

But Mrs Temple's attention was attracted elsewhere, and she withdrew from the discussion.

'I agreed fully in what you were saying just now, Miss Grahame,' said Mr Thornton; for, unperceived by Nellie, he had been an interested listener, much to Lily's amusement. 'We do not think enough of the "proportion of faith"—full-sided, many-sided—and we are afraid to grasp it. That is a deep word of the Apostle's about "growing up into Christ in all things"—receiving His teaching *in its fulness*—so glorious, and yet so human—not destroying, but renewing—the only remedy for one-sidedness.'

'Ah,' said Nellie, with a flash of her old vehemence; 'so many stop short of that. They accept one side, but they are afraid of the other; or, they will take it so far, but they dare not follow it out. They wonder if it is not dangerous: if there is not some other truth which it con-

tradicts. I suppose their faith is not fearless enough for them to leave all that to God.'

'His truth cannot be dangerous—is that what you mean? but man's limitations may, I suppose,' he added smiling, with a glance at Mrs Temple, 'you would find it hard to make your friend understand that.'

'People think by rote; it saves trouble.'

'Yes, for, even to comprehend the bearings of what appears to be one's own position, requires an effort; and, besides the effort, one needs a certain amount of largeness of mind so to *enter into* other people's views, as to see the worth or worthlessness of them.'

But here came a proposal for music, and Nellie, of course, was needed for the piano. The Vicar was very sorry—music did not interest him, while conversation did, being a rare treat beside. And this Miss Grahame was pleasant to talk to; she seemed to have more ideas than women generally, and some little power of clearly expressing them. And her voice! It was nearly as sweet as his lost Alice's murmuring cooing tones; but fuller, and with richer depth.

The Vicar listened while she sang. He knew nothing of air or words, but he was dimly conscious of something he liked. The drawing-room was pretty too, with its brightness and flowers; bits of needlework lying about, and general traces of feminine presence;—a contrast to his dim untidy study—the only living-room he had inhabited since Alice had been taken from him.

The rest of the house he gave up to his old Martha, reinstated now in office and amiability, who shrouded the ornaments in tissue paper, and the chairs in ghastly brown Holland, and suffered no ray of sunshine to enter, for fear of the carpet. He had looked into the drawing-room once, but its gloom chilled him. Only one thing remained the same—the low chair by the window, with the work-table near, where lay a dainty little frock, hastily folded together, with the needle left in it. He would not have that touched. For the rest of the room, Martha had all her own way.

But, as Mr Thornton's eyes wandered here and there while Nellie sang, it suddenly struck him that he would tell Martha to take off those dismal things, whatever they were, that made the room look so funereal. And what if he should ask the Hall party for—well, not for dinner, nor for an evening; but what was it they called tea at four o'clock now-a-days? The Vicar could not remember, but with characteristic simplicity he went straight to Mrs Ware and asked her.

'What? A kettle-drum?'

'Ah, kettle-drum! How in the world did the name originate? But, at any rate, will you all come and have one with me some day?'

Lily was doubtful how many the 'all' included. 'Bring the children too,' he added; 'Leslie must learn to do the honours of his own nursery. Poor little man! I am afraid he has every chance to be very selfish; he

knows nothing about giving up. Well—when will you come?’

‘This is Thursday. Papa will be here for a few days next week; shall we wait till then? say Tuesday?’

‘Very well. I want to have a talk with you about one or two things.’

‘Mrs Ware thought he might come to the Hall any morning he liked, but she was only too glad at this sign that he was throwing off his recluse habits, and learning to mingle again in the ordinary life around him.

For some time after his wife's death, Mr Thornton had shut himself up entirely, except on Sundays, from sight and sound of his fellow-beings. But, when he came forth again, he was a changed man. The consecration of sorrow was upon him, and he recognised it as a setting apart for his Master's service—that Master with whom he had come face to face in the darkness, and recognised as his living Lord. There was attention in Alveston Church now. The preacher's message came from his heart, and reached the hearts of his hearers.

‘Well, Nellie, how did you enjoy yourself?’ asked Winnie, when the last of the guests had driven away.

‘Much more than I expected.’

‘This is hardly a compliment, Miss Grahame,’ said Arthur Ware, ‘you would rather have been “holding a meeting” in some of your East End courts.’

Nellie smiled a little sadly. 'My poor mothers! It seems hardly right to be enjoying myself when I think of them.'

'Nonsense; that is one of the overstrained morbid ideas you good ladies slide into, when you work away by yourselves in a groove, that grows deeper and narrower, till you cannot see over the edges of it. Remember what your favourite Ruskin says of the "duty of delight."'

Nellie's thoughts glanced at the luxurious home. It was a duty not hard to practise *there*.

'If I lived here,' she said, 'I should grow self-indulgent; but I do not think I should like to leave my work.'

'You do not know,' said Lily; ~~she was~~ more tolerant now than in the days when she groaned over her step-mother's 'mistake;' for happiness brings to some the softening which pain brings to others—'work may take different aspects, and I suppose it might be possible to combine what you would technically call "work," with a life in which there might be a great deal of delight too, *Possible*'—she added, with a look at her sister—'but one does not always aim at the goal one sees.'

'Do you remember?' said Winnie, as they went upstairs, 'a talk we had with Miss May, out in the dear old Hollies' garden.'

'Yes; I was thinking of it as I spoke. How one misses her—the wisdom no less than the love! There—

goodnight—do not stay up talking, you two; it is late enough for Winnie, with her pale face.'

'You did not know Miss May as I did,' said Winnie, as Nellie Grahame turned with her into her room.

'No; I only loved her at a distance. We had one talk, though I am not sure that it helped to bring us nearer. There are some Christians, for whose understanding one must be content to wait. We do not speak quite the same language, and the unknown tongue is difficult to translate. But God hears and understands us both, and bye-and-bye we shall understand each other. But her life did me good. I am sure it must have had a history.'

'It had. Papa told me after she was dead. She was engaged to somebody—some young officer; so good and noble, papa said—for years and years of patient waiting—and—he died.'

'Poor Miss May—and yet, even in the midst of her grief, I think she was almost to be envied.'

'I know what you mean,' said Winnie. The two women looked into one another's eyes.

'A sorrow like that is so holy'—Nellie went on,—
'there is no waste in it. For though a noble life might be broken here, it was lifted for higher use elsewhere—where

"All transplanted human worth
Shall bloom to profit."

It is not lost—held in God's keeping, and though the

yearning after it must be so unutterably lonely, it could have no bitterness. But the lives that are wasted, like wrecks upon the sea—how shall one think of them ?

‘ Surely,’ said Winnie, softly, ‘ that they are held in God’s keeping too. How else could one bear to think of them at all ?’





CHAPTER XIX.

KETTLE-DRUM

MR THORNTON was a man by no means deficient in courage, of more kinds than one; but he, nevertheless, dreaded his house-keeper. She kept him in order, as she kept his furniture, and would have liked to keep his books; but on this one point Mr Thornton held his own.

'Tell Martha I want to speak to her,' he said to the young parlour-maid, as she removed the breakfast equipage on the morning of the 'kettle-drum.'

And though he would not have liked to own it, his reading of the *Times* meanwhile was disturbed by planning how to open the conference diplomatically. Martha, when she appeared, did not look promising. She never visited her moods upon 'the master,' but he was sensitive to atmospheric influences, and could feel them in the air.

'Did Betty Higgins send for some broth yesterday, Martha?'

'La, yes, sir; but they arn't much charity, them

Higgins.' She's an idle gossip—I cannot bear her a-coming to the house.'

'But she has been very ill, Martha,' said the Vicar, smiling.

Martha gave a sort of grunt. 'There, illness and idleness. Some kinds go by wrong name.'

'Well—but the poor little children;—they would be the better for some of your good broth.'

Martha was not mollified. She did not think children had any business in the world at all, except Leslie. So she only looked at the littered study table, and sighed out—

'I suppose you could not let the room be cleaned, sir? I would do it myself, and put everything back. It wants it, awful!'

'Oh, I do not think it is so bad. But, by the way, Martha, could you brighten up the drawing-room a bit? I expect—hem—I have asked Mrs Ware and some ladies from the Hall, this afternoon.'

Martha stared. 'Well, I suppose they will not stay, and the dining-room is all in order.'

'Yes; but the room upstairs may as well be used—they will be here a couple of hours or so—you can make them a cup of tea.'

'Tea! why, it will be before dinner!'

'Never mind,' said the Vicar, laughing, while he did his best to explain to Martha's old-fashioned comprehension the nature and order of a kettle-drum, ending by a

suggestion, that as these September days were chilly, she had better light a fire.

'A fire!' Martha could contain herself no longer—'and the grate all done up beautiful, and polished so you could see yourself!' She ventured no more in the study, nor, indeed, in the kitchen; only Jane had experience of a worse 'contrary fit' than usual, and was greatly mystified by hearing Martha repeat at intervals,

'Kettle-drums, indeed! Kettle of nonsense! Tea in the afternoon, like all the washer-women in the village! Such ways gentle folks do get!'

So Martha's reception of the carriage-full of ladies and children was not over gracious. She led the way to the drawing-room, however, and announced that Master would be in directly—he had been sent for out.'

Leslie clung to her gown, and looked frightened at the strange faces; and when Gertie Ware, wishing to be friends with the shy boy, went up to him for a kiss, he resolutely turned away. He was a pale, fragile fellow, with a motherless look about him, which set a strange undefinable difference between him and the other children. Artie seemed to feel it, and shrunk from him; but Gertie, —woman in her babyhood,—only tried the more to win a smile. And at length she succeeded. Gradually, very gradually, Martha's gown was let go, and Leslie, attracted by one wile after another, fairly yielded, and went over to the enemy. Whereupon Martha stalked out of the room, more 'contrary' than ever.

'It is very cheerless,' said Winnie, shivering, as she looked at the 'done up' grate—(Martha had *not* lighted a fire)—'is it not odd how one feels the influence of things about one,—those formal chairs and those unread, unreadable books!'

'Poor Thornton,' said Dr Hope, as he touched, with almost reverent fingers, the work-basket left on the stand. 'It is not his rooms only that are empty!' He looked dreamily, towards the Churchyard elms. The new love was tender and true, but the old was buried deep.

Just then the Vicar returned, his greeting a trifle more stiff than usual; for the entering that room was to him like the opening of yonder green grave, where his own hand had planted the violets. And, as he came up the walk, he had caught sight of another figure in his Alice's seat by the window.

But, for courtesy's sake, he tried to put memory by. And, indeed, he was soon lost in the interest of some scientific discussion with the Doctor (Mr Ware had been prevented from joining the party by a sudden summons to town), while the ladies worked and listened, and sometimes joined, and the children played, with occasional breaks in their harmony. Bye-and-bye came a little merriment, not untouched with sadness, over Martha's ordering of kettle-drum; and as she sat at her own tea in the kitchen, she heard her master's laugh, silent for many a day.

But other sounds followed, which made the good

woman lay down her second cup untasted. Little Artie, not so socially inclined as his sister, and never so happy as when he could nestle by aunt Winnie's side, crept up to her now, with a request he was always making—

‘Play thome muthick, auntie?’ It came in a very audible whisper, just in an unfortunate lull of talk. Winnie tried not to hear, but the little voice pleaded again—

‘Thome muthick, aunt ie?’

‘Hush, darling, not now—go back and play.’

Artie looked wistful; but he was moving away in obedience, when the Vicar himself rose and opened the piano.

‘I am afraid you will find it very much out of tune,’ he said.

Every one looked uncomfortable; but Winnie felt that hesitation would only make matters worse, so she played one of the simple tunes Artie delighted in—all her fingers could remember after these years of illness.

Mr Thornton looked out of the window. The first chord was hard to bear; but, by the time Winnie ended, he remembered Miss Grahame's voice. He would like to hear it again—would she sing?

And he sat and watched her while she sang, as he had been used to watch his wife.

‘We shall have a wet evening, I am afraid,’ said Dr Hope, when the music ceased—‘it is thickening in, all round. Winnie, my dear—’ he looked at her anxiously.

‘You think I should go?’

'I do, indeed, if you are to drive back in the pony carriage.' The other carriage was to take Mrs Ware, Nellie, and himself to Carnford, he leaving for Arlingford by a train at six, and Mr Ware being expected by one half an hour later.

Mr Thornton was very sorry. The time had flown by more quickly than he often knew it to run, and the drawing-room wore a home look, with the children's toys on the floor, and some of the chairs pulled out of their places. He thought he would have tea there again some day; but then, if he were alone, it would not be the same.

'You stay for the other carriage, do you not?' he said to Nellie, as he watched her drawing on a shawl.

'Yes; but it is coming, is it not? I hear wheels.'

'Mr Ware was so sorry not to be here, Mr Thornton,' said Lily—'he sent many regrets.'

'Yes; I am sorry, too,' said the Vicar—'I wanted to see him on school business. I will come up to-morrow. What time do you breakfast?'

'Nine o'clock. You will be sure to find him then—and Nellie, too,' she added, to herself, but not to him. And during the drive to Carnford she mused how, with some men, to love once, is to begin loving on; while, with others, it is the sealing of love for evermore.

Rain had begun before Winnie quite reached home. At first she enjoyed the splash of one or two heavy drops on her face. It was new to be 'out in the wet.'

as Artie shouted, stretching out his hands to catch the patter-patter as it fell. But soon they grew so heavy, that she was glad of shelter—glad of stillness too, for she was weary.

‘Auntie tired?’ said the children, as they heard her telling nurse to take them upstairs, while she untied her hat, and threw herself on the breakfast-room sofa.

‘Yes, auntie tired. But you shall come down again bye-and-bye.’

So they trotted off, and she was left to ponder, rather sadly, Artie’s question, as he peeped round the door—‘When will ’oo be rested?’

When, indeed?—When this short drive had set every nerve throbbing, and she knew the night would bring no sleep. The two hours had been full of enjoyment, but the penalty was heavy. Must it be always so?

She felt rather lonely too. The sunshine in other lives *was* bright to watch, but it now and then made her own seem grey. For her place was only that of a looker-on. There was no love peculiarly *her own*. Lily’s children were dearly fond of ‘auntie;’ but she was not their mother. Perhaps she had no great trials; but there are shadows that only fall because of the light.

Why should such thoughts come to-day? Was it because she fancied that in another solitary life she saw a little flash of ‘something coming?’ Perhaps—and, if it were so, she was very honestly glad. Nellie would be happier married, she thought,—possibly better too—more

really *herself*. Her character was always clear and true, but it was not without a certain tendency to set into sharp crystals. Some women need softening by the joy of hope fulfilled ; even as, for others, the pain of hope broken accomplishes the same end.

And for herself—ah, well, as Nellie had once said, in a letter from her East End lodging—‘If we are left in solitude, we are not without companionship. We are getting into the middle age which used to seem so dusty and unpoetical. But it has its heritage of helpful blessing for others, and the summer fruit may find some place for use and beauty between spring freshness and autumn harvest.’

Winnie went to the window and looked out. The rain had ceased, and the low sunbeams, breaking through clouds, crept to her feet with their golden promise. ‘No good thing shall He withhold’—this was their silent message. Had not she also some messages to bear for her Lord ? Was not her life His, and, for the joy of it, would not He care ?





CHAPTER XX.

A SONG OF DELIVERANCE.

MRS WARE and NELLIE, meanwhile, had seen one of their travellers off, and were waiting for the other. They paced the platform for some time, for the Ladies' Room at Carnford Station offered small repose and less cheer.

'This reminds me of Miss May,' said Lily, as they walked—'a railway station was always a favourite resort of hers. I wish you had known her, Nellie. One's life must be richer, when the memory of such a friend shines out of the past and into the future.'

'And I wish I had known her too. I believe we should have differed about many things, but I should have liked her better than most people I do not differ with. And yet, I wonder if she was loveable to begin with! I hardly think so. But that made me like her. Her goodness was a sort of militant force, very encourag-

ing to behold, when one feels always at war with something, inside or out.'

'Yes—I liked Miss May,' continued Nellie, musingly—'there was something positive about her. Many people seem to think that all excellence consists in *not* being and *not* doing. While they do not believe certain wrong doctrines, or do certain wrong things (themselves being judges of the wrong), it does not matter about their easy, dreamy lives, that are of no more use in the world than an old almanac. And then, from their little narrow round, they look out, and judge those who are wearing heart and brain to death in the strife with sorrow and sin, which *they* never help on to victory!'

Lily only looked her answer, a half smile, which Nellie understood.

'There again! I believe I am growing bitter. One may be intolerant of intolerance;—and it is a very subtle form of uncharitableness. Oh me—it is hard to keep criticism for one's self, instead of spending it on other folk.'

'Nellie!' Lily exclaimed suddenly, 'do notice that lady we met just now. We have passed and repassed her again and again, and she looks at us so earnestly through her veil; I wish it was not so thick—I am sure I have seen her before!'

'I was noticing her,' said Nellie; 'she troubles me, I cannot tell how.'

'Hush!' For even as she spoke, the same slight veiled figure glided close past them.

'She must know us—and she must have heard us—I wish we could get away from her, Lily.'

'Nonsense,'—Lily had no comprehension of intuitive fears or antipathies; 'but, at any rate, the train cannot be long,—is it not behind time?' she asked a porter, who was just bustling past. But the man either did not or would not hear her.

'Why—it is half an hour late,' said Nellie, 'I had no idea.'

Just then the station-master came up. He knew the Alveston carriage, and had seen Mr Ware go off in the morning.

'Train is late in,' he said, apologetically,—'did you come to meet Mr Ware?'

'Yes,' said Lily; 'why is the delay?'

He hesitated, and finally went off without answering. There seemed a good deal of unaccountable bustle,—porters running hither and thither,—orders and counter-orders screamed in quick succession. Lily saw her own servant, too, on the platform, looking at her doubtfully.

'Is Harrison troubled about the horses?' she asked, beckoning the man towards her.

'He thinks he had better put them up, ma'am.'

'Put them up—nonsense! Why the train is overdue!'

But, as she spoke, the station-master came up again. 'There has been an accident,' he said, brusquely, looking straight before him. Here Nellie perceived that the mysterious veiled figure was standing close by her.

‘An accident!’ Lily asked no question. She only grasped Nellie’s arm, and waited.

‘Yes—I’m afraid it is a bad job—collision with a luggage-train—three killed and some hurt.’

‘Do you know any more?’ asked Nellie.

‘No, ma’am—so you need not be fearing the worst.’ This was for Lily; but she hardly heard, and would not have been much comforted, if she had.

‘Where was it?’ she gasped at last.

‘Twenty miles down the line?’

‘Cannot I go? Cannot you send me?’ She implored.

‘Could not, ma’am—it is not to be thought of.’ He was so much moved, that the words were growled out under his moustache,—‘we have just sent an engine and carriages, and two doctors.’

Lily turned sick at this last addition. ‘Come to my house, ma’am, and wait, it is close by. You will be more comfortable there.’

‘No, no,’ said Lily, ‘I will go into the waiting-room; it does not matter where, so that it is near.’

She staggered into it, and threw herself on a seat—Nellie beside her. The stranger followed, but she seemed too restless to do anything but wander about.

‘Are you expecting friends too?’ Nellie asked at last, as she passed near their corner. She was determined, if possible, to break the spell.

‘Yes—no; I am going on by a train that will start directly.’

She lingered near them now, as if she wished to say more. Lily looked up, half startled, at the first sound of her voice, but the room was dark, and the envious veil betrayed only the outline of a face.

'You must not fear,' the stranger said, looking at her; 'there are many chances. And if not—I tell you, Lilies Hope, many a woman, with eyes that have wept all their tears, would bid you give God thanks.'

She threw back her veil as she spoke. 'Claude—Claude Raynor!' exclaimed both at once.

'You need not shrink,' she said, as she observed Nellie step back, 'if I have sinned I have suffered. If you knew all, you would forgive.'

'I have nothing to forgive,' said Nellie, gently. She held out her hand, but Claude's eyes were only for Lily.

'Yes,' she went on, 'even if God took him, after these years of rested, satisfied love, you might well be glad. He would be yours still, even there.'

'And you?' said Lily—for she dared not let herself take in the full meaning of her words.

'I am going to my children at the seaside. I sent them there alone, but I can do no good by staying—the tide is too strong,—I cannot strive against it. You will hear,' she added recklessly, and yet her look was half appealing—'you will hear of my doing strange things some day, and you will brand me as "fast." Many women are scorned as such, when they are only miserable—only maddened by pain and despair. You might

pity us, you women with happy homes and quiet hearts. But you are hard—even the best of you.’

‘Nay,’ said Lily, laying her hand on Claude’s arm, ‘I shall never have any but loving thoughts of you, whatever I hear. Only for your own sake—your children—.’

She moaned, and turned away. ‘Do not talk to me. Hark—there is the bell!’ She wrung Lily’s hand, and was gone. Nellie would have followed, but a slight gesture repelled her.

‘Do not leave Mrs Ware ; and, for him, he will be safe.’

Safe! yes; Lily knew that,—in the deepest sense; but still, as she sat down again, the sickness of suspense was almost more than she could bear. The safety might come, in his being kept where no yearning of sight or voice could follow him. She could not think of Claude now. She could only think of Arthur—going over and over the years of their wedded joy—so full, as Claude had said, of rested, satisfied love. And yet, as she thought of them, other thoughts rose, that would not be bidden back, and some heart-searching, of which she was herself hardly conscious, went on while she leaned her head down in a corner of the waiting-room couch. There are some moments, mostly of keenest suffering, when we look at ourselves as if we were not ourselves—the only point whence our view is clear. And so the backward glance at these four past years showed Lily much she did not see while she moved through them.

She had so joyed in the unutterably rich and sweet gifts they brought—that she had,—not *forgotten* the Giver;—Oh no, for her heart was often brimming over with thankfulness: but she thought of Him as giving only, not as commanding. She had forgotten that, having received all, she must yield all,—that the law of sacrifice must rule, in any life which Christ has redeemed. He had done so much for her, but she could only listen with shame as she heard Him say,—

‘What hast thou done for Me?’

But it was something to know the voice which spoke—to know it as His—her own Redeemer. Even through that hour of darkness, her soul held to this sure anchorage, and did not lose its moorings. It was all she could do,—but it was a great deal,—even that.

So absorbed was she, that she almost started as she felt a light touch on her shoulder. It was Nellie.

‘The train is coming, Lily.’ And, in fact, before they reached the platform, it had stopped.

‘*You* look, Nellie,’ she whispered; for to her everything was growing dark. But just as Nellie, seeing her white face, was trying to place her on a seat near, she was gently pushed aside. There was a stronger arm for her to lean upon—a voice, she knew it, even though it faltered,—‘*Lilias*, look up—I am safe.’

After Winnie and Nellie left them that evening, Lily told her husband of Claude. He listened in troubled silence, one arm round her as she knelt by his side.

‘Did she give her address? You must write to her. Lily; and,’ he added, softly, ‘pray for her always, as I do.’

‘Always!’ Might she not well do it!

‘There are “songs of deliverance” to-night, Arthur,’ Lily whispered after a while; ‘only think—if I had been here—*alone*!’

She shivered, even with her face resting on his shoulder.

‘Yes; for “creation—preservation, and all the blessings of this life”—and for the hope which makes them blessings.’

‘Ah,’ Lily answered, with kindling eyes, remembering the retrospect of that hour at the railway—‘may our praise be, “not with our lips, but in our lives”!’



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